JOHNNY CRAIG

XNO
1983

NO. 10

HORROR FROM THE CRYPT OF FEAR

10¢

A year ago I didn't think it was going to be possible to put together a better issue than #9...but I think I pulled it off...in fact, I know that I pulled it off! The quality of the art and articles that you are about to experience are top notch. I would like to thank all the contributors individually, but space does not permit me to do that here. You probably already noticed the great cover painting by **JOHNNY CRAIG**. As you flip through the pages of this zine you will find other new pieces by veteran EC artists such as: **AL FELDSTEIN, JACK KAMEN, GEORGE EVANS, MARIE SEVERIN** and **AL WILLIAMSON**.

MAD Magazine artists **KELLY FREAS, SERGIO ARAGONES, MONTE WOLVERTON** and **BILL WRAY** have also created some special pieces just for this issue. But the list of artists doesn't stop there. Gracing our pages once again is **KEN HOOPER, BOB X, CECIL SUTTON, RICK OLSON, MATT KIMBLE** and one of my favorite monster makers, **XNO**!

XNO is responsible for the gruesome hanging torso that you see to your left...this pencil drawing was created in 1983 and is noted as the "first" piece that he signed with his pen name "**XNO**". There are three other pieces from **XNO** in this issue including a portrait of "yours truly", a cool lab scene featuring "Big Head Frankie" (speaking of heads...mine was decapitated just for that particular painting...see if you can find it!) and a tight pencil drawing of Frankie creating his future bride.

New to our pages, but not to the art world is the outstanding talent of **BILL STOUT, FOX HUGHES, RICH DANNYS, ED FIELDS, DAVID BURKE, BRUCE TIMM** and **JAS INGRAM**.

Our issue is rounded out with articles by **George Evans, Jack Kamen, John Witek, Ken Kaffke, Roger Hill, David Burlington, Grant Geissman** and **Sig Case**. I know that you will enjoy reading and viewing these pages...almost as much as I have enjoyed putting them together. Your comments are always a welcome contribution to the future of this fanzine.

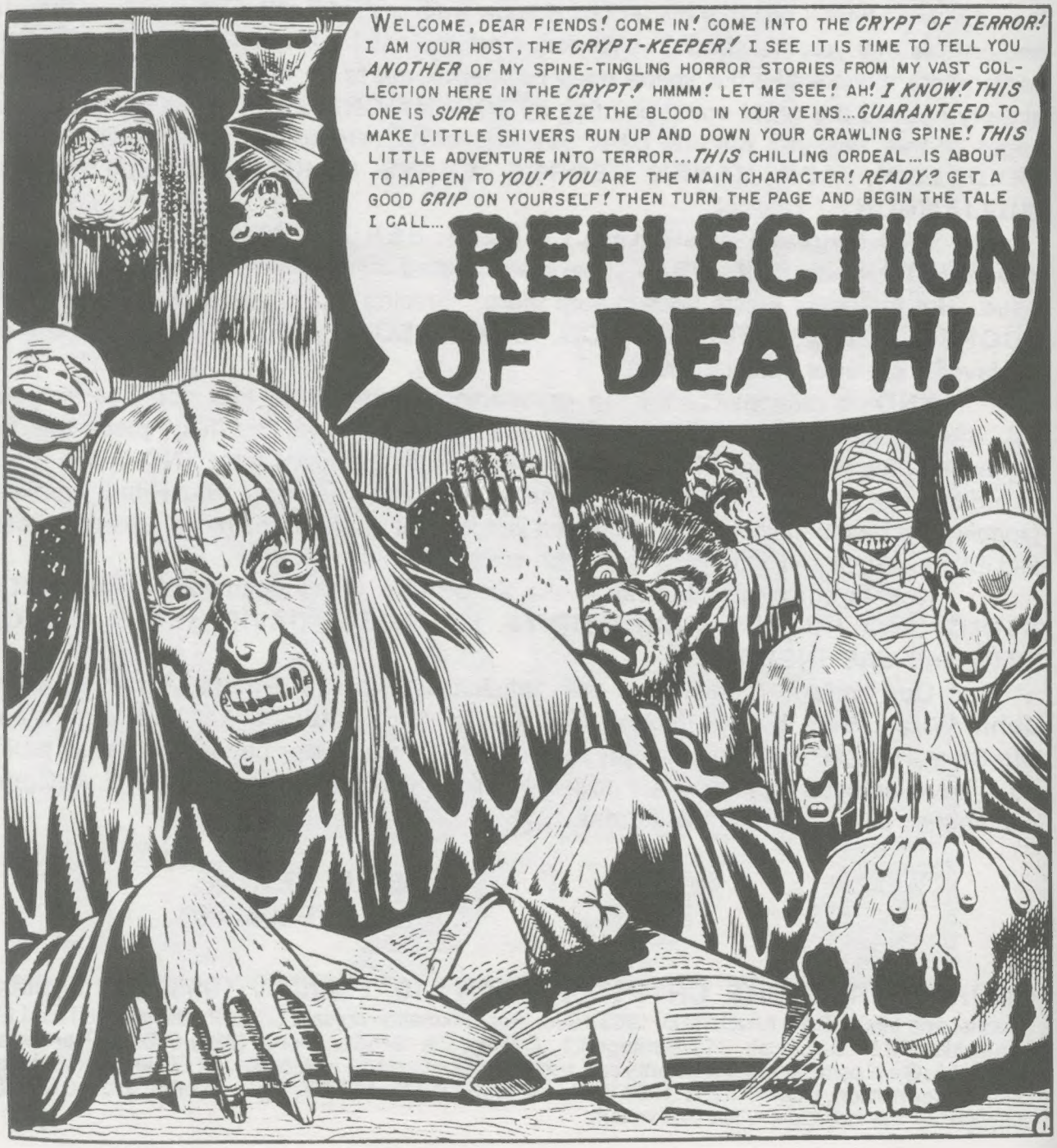
BILL LEACH
Editor/Publisher

HORROR FROM THE CRYPT OF FEAR #10, February 1998, 300 copies
Founder and friend: SAM KINGSTON 1963-1996. For information contact Editor/Publisher and Head EC Fan-Addict BILL LEACH at: 117 Heritage Ct., Oakley, CA 94561, phone: (925) 679-8387 or Email: comicart4u@aol.com, letters, comments and submissions are gladly welcomed. All EC artwork and logo used by permission, COPYRIGHT 1998 WILLIAM M. GAINES, AGENT, INC., all other art and articles copyright by the individual artists and writers.

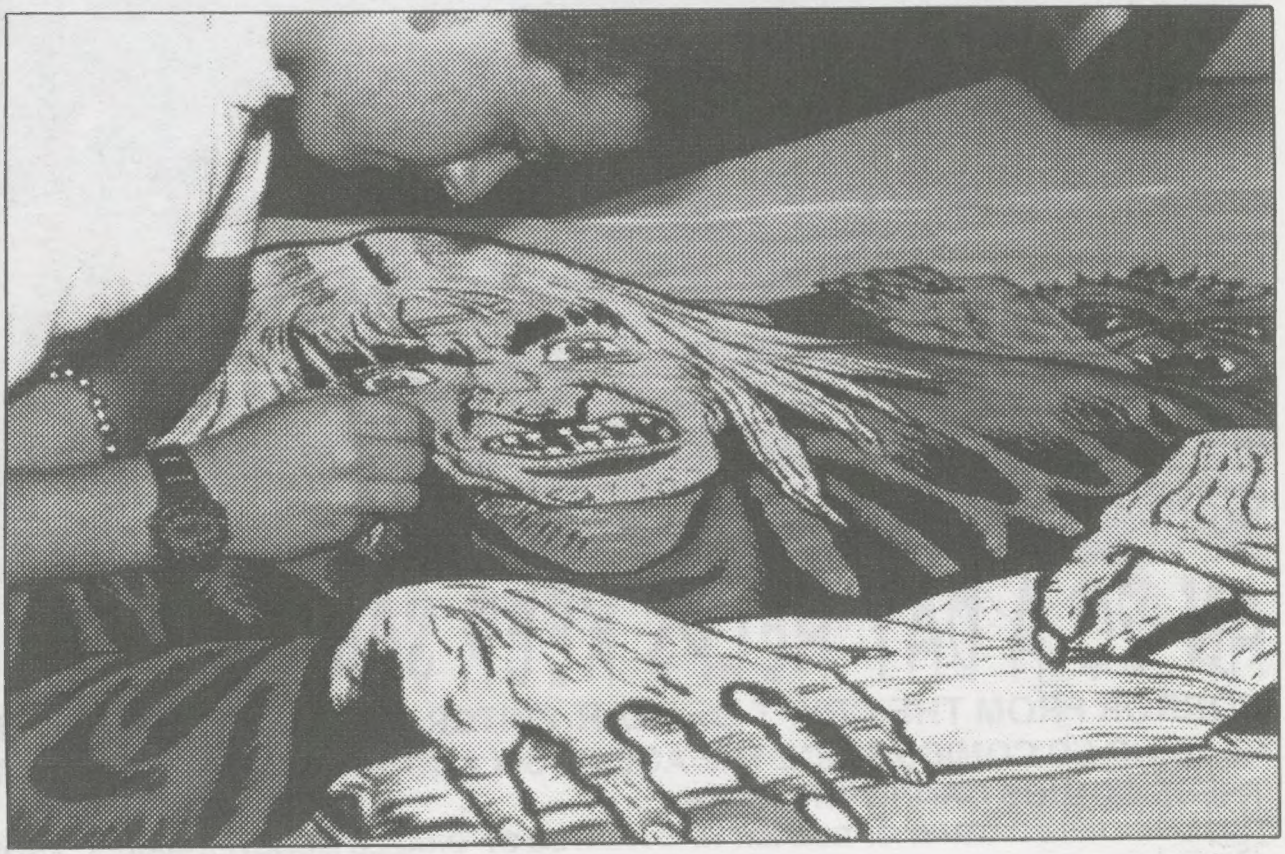
FELDSTEIN

The artistic abilities of Al Feldstein are quite evident in this classic splash page from **"REFLECTION OF DEATH"** (**TFTC** #23, 1951). The first piece of original EC art that I (Bill Leach...you know me, I'm the editor of this fanzine) ever purchased was this complete story (I still have it on my wall). This story was also used in the 1972 AMICUS FILMS release **"TALES FROM THE CRYPT"**.

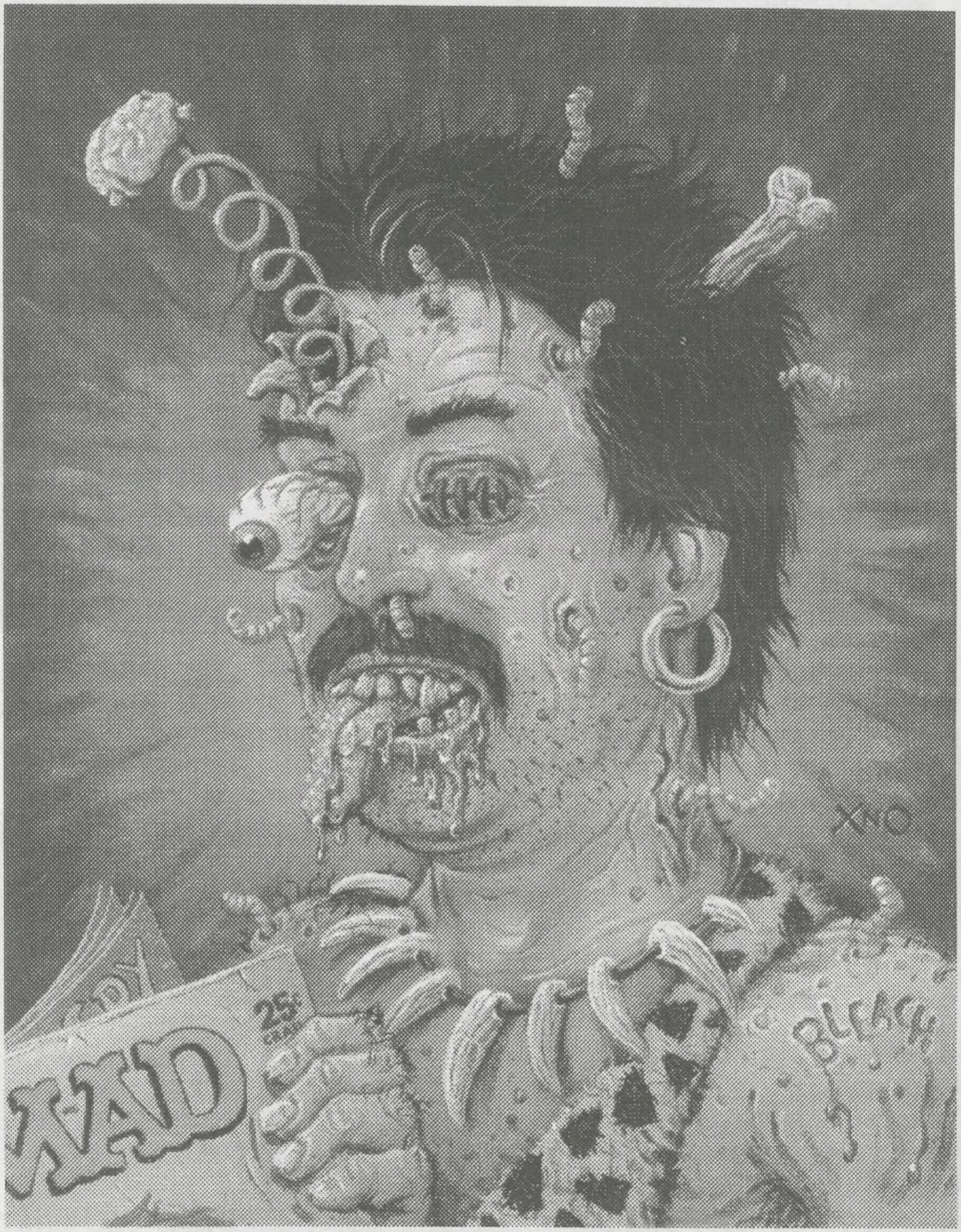
In 1995 Feldstein created a variation on this theme for a painting titled, **"THE ORIGINAL EC CRYPT KEEPER AND FRIENDS"**. This horribly fantastic 22 x 28 inch acrylic painting (at right) was featured in the 1995 Sotheby's Art Auction and is now in a private collection.


WELCOME, DEAR FIENDS! COME IN! COME INTO THE CRYPT OF TERROR! I AM YOUR HOST, THE CRYPT-KEEPER! I SEE IT IS TIME TO TELL YOU ANOTHER OF MY SPINE-TINGLING HORROR STORIES FROM MY VAST COLLECTION HERE IN THE CRYPT! HMMM! LET ME SEE! AH! I KNOW! THIS ONE IS SURE TO FREEZE THE BLOOD IN YOUR VEINS...GUARANTEED TO MAKE LITTLE SHIVERS RUN UP AND DOWN YOUR CRAWLING SPINE! THIS LITTLE ADVENTURE INTO TERROR...THIS CHILLING ORDEAL...IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN TO YOU! YOU ARE THE MAIN CHARACTER! READY? GET A GOOD GRIP ON YOURSELF! THEN TURN THE PAGE AND BEGIN THE TALE I CALL...
REFLECTION OF DEATH!

Splash pages and paintings such as these continue to inspire artists of all ages. One of my art students (below) painted his own version of the **CRYPT KEEPER**. He actually used the **"REFLECTION OF DEATH"** splash page as reference and the final product was used for the high school's haunted house.



HAVE YOU READ AN EC TODAY?

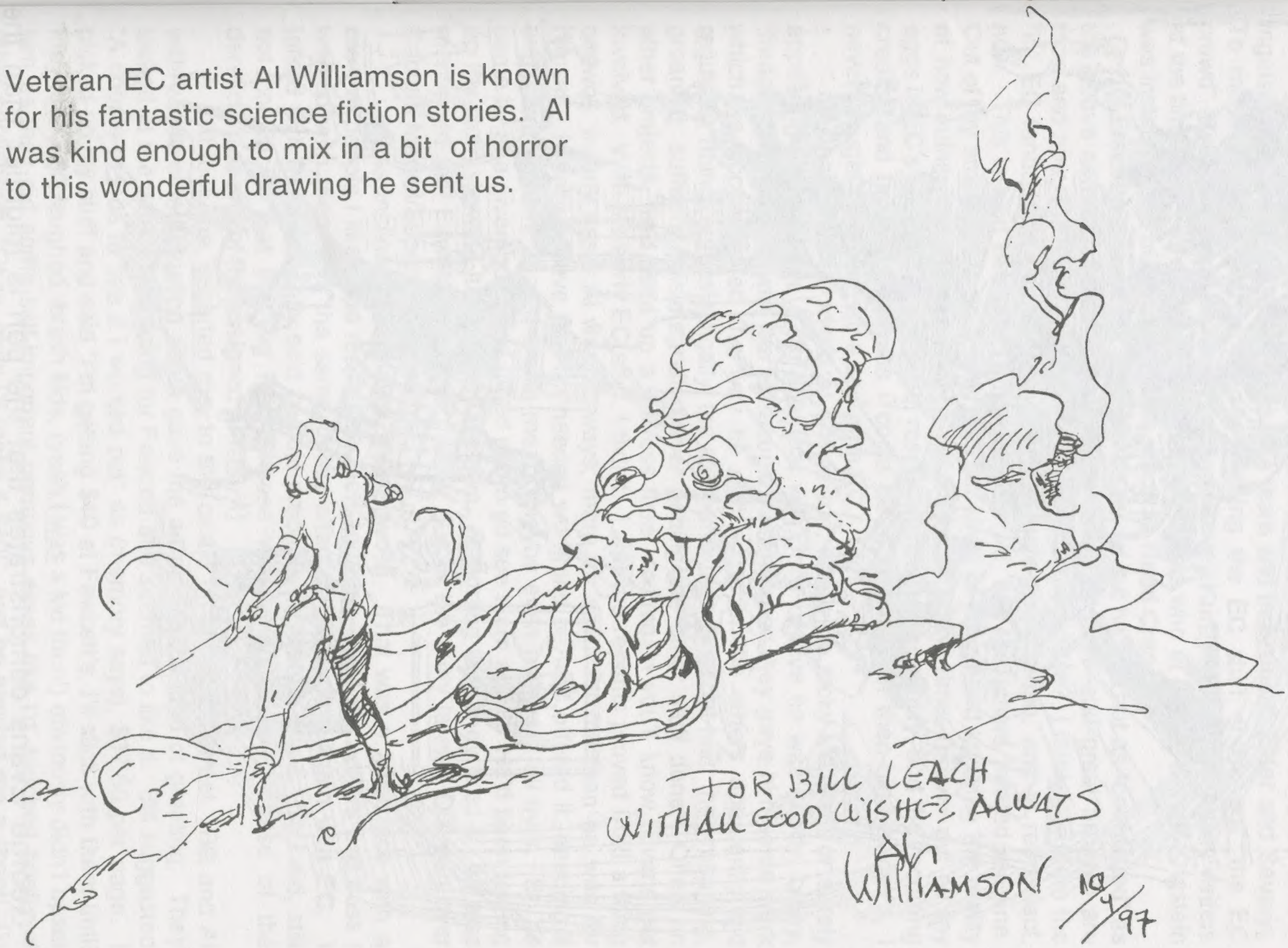


AN EC A DAY HELPS KEEP SANITY AWAY!

HORROR FROM THE CRYPT OF FEAR EDITOR, BILL LEACH, HAS BEEN READING EC COMICS SINCE THE AGE OF SIX AND IS LIVING PROOF THAT THESE COMICS CAN'T HURT YOU!

THIS LIFE-LIKE PORTRAIT OF BLEACH WAS PAINTED BY CRAZED MONSTER MAKER "XNO".

Veteran EC artist Al Williamson is known for his fantastic science fiction stories. Al was kind enough to mix in a bit of horror to this wonderful drawing he sent us.



George Evans demonstrates that the pen is mightier than the sword as he battles the Ghoulunatics for creative control in this comical "behind the scenes" look into his private art studio.

GEORGE EVANS REMEMBERS

Producing EC comics was a team-effort. There were the core EC artists: Ingels, Orlando, Wood, Davis, and as a team and individuals, Elder and Severin. To most--including the people republishing the EC stuff, those are "the EC crowd". Of course add Al Feldstein and Harvey Kurtzman as essentially writers at the time I got there. And of subsequent artists who fit better, Bernie Krigstein was instantly "one of EC", almost as much as Reed Crandall.

Frazetta's name will naturally be there, but he was not as "committed" as the above named. Same with Al Williamson until later--and great as both are then and now, I think they're regarded as part-timers. Me? I think I was, (to the "in" EC fandom), a bench warmer or alternate player--then, and in retrospect, now. This is said not as a complaint. Bill, Al, and the others treated me fine. Out of my ambitions to do a slew of other kinds of things and knowing the reality of how vulnerable the comic book industry was at the time, I never put all my eggs in EC's basket. In any case, respecting the better quality, and the recurring credits, and being as busy as I could be in comics with then-big Fawcett's, I never thought of looking for a spot with EC.

Long time dear friend Al Williamson, happy go lucky kid then, or surely appearing so, did have a big goal that way, for I believe he was buddy, crony, "fleagle" (their name) with the EC people. In any case they gave him some work which he accomplished the way he and some of the others apparently did regularly; doing, enthusiastically, the segments that delighted him, then moaning, groaning, suffering, disintegrating over getting the other stuff done. Often on other projects, he'd send up a distress flare, and again you'll know, Evans got involved. With his early EC stuff, I didn't. Later the reprints proved I did a thing or two. In any case, Al was, in ways, more an agent for me than he was for himself. I really believe that if I needed work and he was offered it, needing it himself, he'd have shared it with me, or maybe even passed it all over. So he came by at a given point and urged me to go see them at EC. He'd been talking up my stuff, showing it along with his own. Reporting that "they liked it", he also mentioned that Fawcett was going under due to the nutty lawsuit DC won over Captain Marvel/Superman problems.

I was inclined still to stick with Fawcett. That was a fine place with a crew of people I liked and respected, then and now. With the editors and boss I worked with there was the same family affection that came again with EC. I talked with them and they said I would probably be wise to leave. So I did, still not convinced that the Big Red Cheese was going to go because of the dereliction of one of the assigned artists.

Al took me, escorted me, to the castle on Lafayette Street. Bill and Al with vague others floating about gave me an old friends kind of greeting. They looked at the work I was doing for Fawcett and seemed to like it. Bill suggested "A couple of jobs to see if I worked out" as (memory says), $37.50 per page. I picked up my stuff and said "I'm getting $40 at Fawcett's, I'll stick with them until they fold". Bill laughed, brash kids, (yeah I was a kid then!) obviously didn't upset him as they did some self-important pompous asses like I'd' touched briefly at other publishers. "Okay, okay I'll make it $40!", and he handed me a script! I'd done Sci-Fi, fantasy and mystery stuff for Fawcett and others. This was a horror story. I don't know which one, but I filled it with dramatic lighting, overloaded

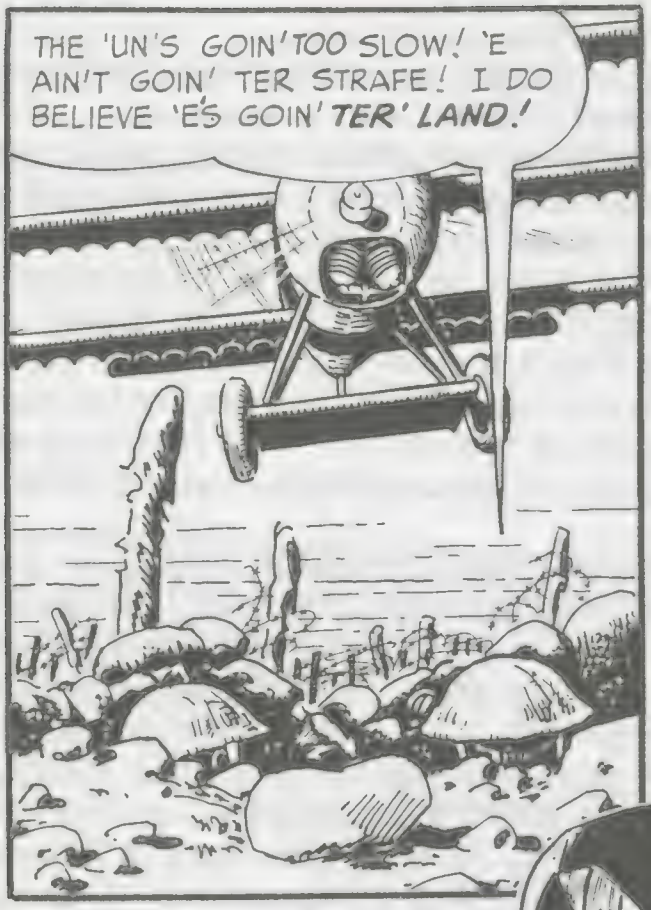
backgrounds, and tickled the heli out of it. I find most of the art I did for EC unsatisfying, but I went with it. Bill and Al went through it, chortling, humming and with their snap ending, laughing in glee. Very flattering. Bill in interviews made kindly comments about it, and I was typecast with horror books until someone mentioned airplanes.

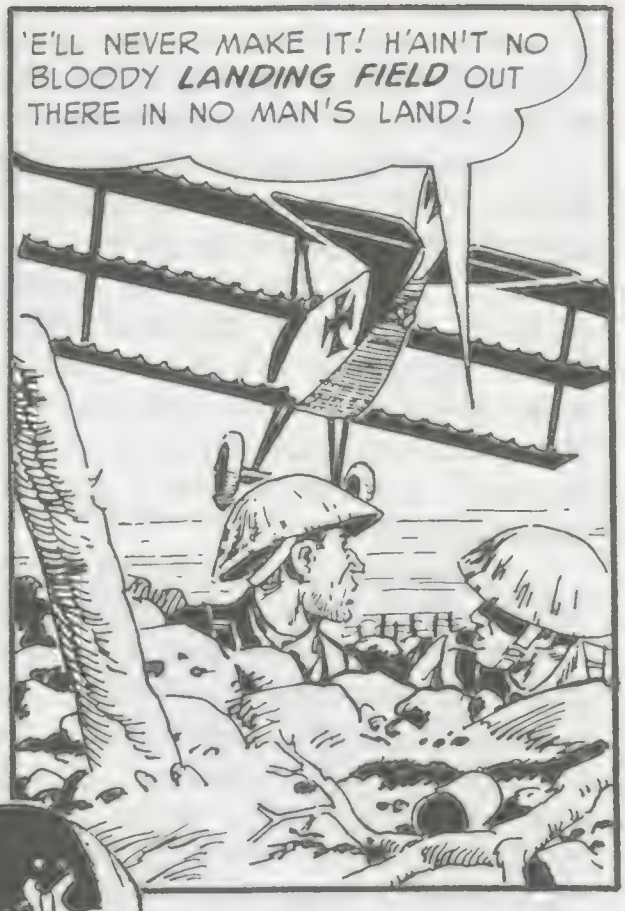
Prior to entry of people like Reed, Bernie, and myself, Bill spread the wealth around liberally with holiday bonuses, group trips, (Haiti the year before my debut), and such. By my time, problems had cut profits and sales, so such extras had dwindled. But, they had a new script every time I turned in a finished story. They let me take what time I needed to do the job (with one or two rush jobs that crept in), and that seemed a hell of a good way to go. In delivering work, other artists would cross paths, so we all got acquainted. Because of mutual interest in historical and military things, John Severin and I hit it off right away. Joe Orlando was an easy to like type. Woody had a coterie that gathered around him, and was pleasant, but sort of walled off. Jack Davis and I didn't cross paths much, but he was likable, bright and friendly. Bill Elder was in effect like a paid entertainer who went non-stop with gags, giggles, stunts, chatter and moving entourage. The only time I got close enough to Elder to say more than "Hi, how's it going?", was when both of us delivered work and found ourselves climbing the same subway exit steps together. On the way to the shop, we quacked, and he was more sober, for the idiot Kefauver stuff had begun, and the cannibalizing media had vultured down on EC specifically. So what I saw was a thoughtful, serious, concerned side to Bill.

Graham Ingles and I had known each other briefly years before. Because he also lived on Long Island, thirty miles beyond me, we often met, invited each other and our families to barbecues and get-togethers, and got to be good friends. It was painful for the Evans' when the Ingels split up, but we managed to stay friends with them all, and though Graham's gone now, we still keep in touch with Trudy and his daughter, Deanna.

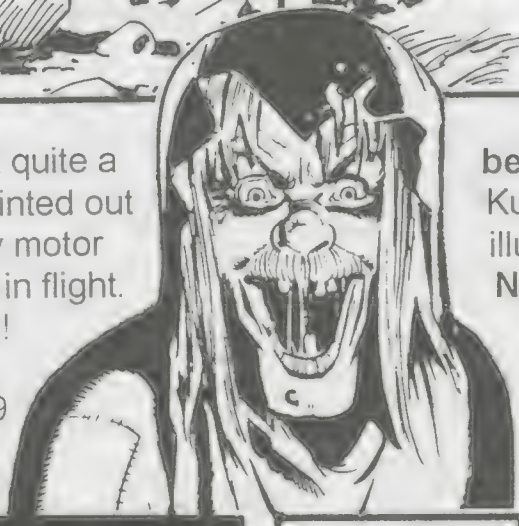
You want to know more about EC though eh? Well, a lot's been printed and would be redundant. I mentioned stories, presumably bought, from other non-EC authors. Delivering a story one-day, a secretary told Bill there was a phone call for him. It was Ray Bradbury, whose story of the incinerated spaceman had been lifted for one tale. He wanted to be paid, that was obvious, with complete equanimity, Bill assured him they'd been trying to get in touch to "make a deal" and finally figured printing it would accomplish that, so "Welcome Ray! Check will follow, and we'll have to meet!" Thus many adaptations from a variety of writers came to EC.

You probably all know that although Harvey Kurtzman and I got along very well, we did it through an almost natural inclination to disagree on just about everything. Although the war books would've been those I'd have pitched for, along with the Sci-Fi, I didn't like the perpetual downer stuff. It seemed that Harvey milked the maudlin stuff, so I stayed away until one of those rush jobs came in and Bill, rather than Harvey, asked me to take it on. It was the Napoleon story and instantly a pain in the ass. Al simply wrote his stories on the working art paper, which had the annoying side that we got it all panelized and that essentially had to accommodate the lettering, (LeRoy by the way), and sometimes, <u>always</u> leaving difficulties with a layout to emphasize the stories and interesting goings on. This drove Bernie Krigstein plain nuts. He defied

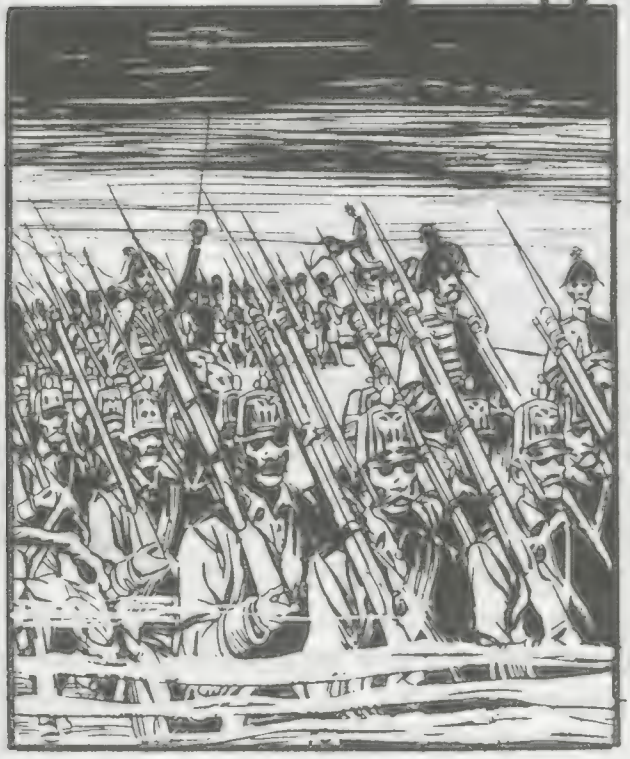




above: Kurtzman took quite a ribbing when Evans pointed out that Richthofen's rotary motor was not spinning while in flight. Such attention to detail! from **"RED KNIGHT"** **Two-Fisted Tales**, #29



below: These panels from Kurtzman's **"NAPOLEAN"** illustrate why Evans,"...did **NOT** want any part of it..." The art was masterfully completed by Evans. **Frontline Combat,** #10



economics and decided to razor up the copy and paste it down to suit his panel concepts—a feat above and beyond valor.

Still that was as it was, it challenged the creativity of us as professional artists. When I saw Harvey's "Napoleon", it was a revelation and not thrilling. Over the EC page blanks were overlays of tracing paper with every jot titled out of Harvey's mind emphatically rendered in heavy pencil, even to the expressions on faces, poses and the whole damned French, Austrian, Russian, Polish and God knows who else's army marching around in panel after panel. Now you've read my lament and amused comments again and again, but it was just traumatic enough to keep crawling up in every exercise such as this. I did NOT want any part of it...but they needed it and no one else was available, or would touch it, and Bill just moaned...

Another story is how I came to do several of Harvey's WWI Air Aces "biographies". John had done the first, "Richthofen" and a damned good job too. At a given point a number of us turned up together, an occasion at which Bill usually took us all out to lunch. Something brought up aviation; Bill had been on a rescue team with the Air Force during WWII, and I was a line-mechanic at a training field. Harvey pricked up, "Like airplanes? See the Richthofen story?" I had and said it was good. Maybe something in my tone needled him. "Something wrong with it?" he wanted to know. Well, by then, much of Gibbon's "fact" material was being questioned, but the truth was, is, and will always be, ALWAYS, so I shrugged. He persisted, "The story? I used the facts. Then, the drawings???" I responded, "No, the drawings are great, but the motors should be going around...rotaries." He knew he was being ridiculed now. No such way! He stared and stared. Harvey said in that mournful way, "Yeah...motors going around"...a joke, but in fact it was not. The rotary engine was a remarkable ingenious engineering creation. The bolt-on cylinders with connecting rods, bearings, had an offset pivot point; the amount of offset being the length of the stroke. Both parts spun and as you'll visualize with different centers, the cylinders slipped onto and off from the pistons as a basic action, with the 1200 rpm rotation plus moving air providing cooling without weighty water jackets.

I had to provide him with some tech stuff after, but I think having the understandable gaff aired among others is what bothered him. Or maybe that it got repeated, which is something out of my hands. And maybe it's not worth repeating now. That I leave to your editor. However, in general there has been too much made of the "authenticity" of all Harvey and Jerry DiFuccio's "research". I don't think generally, anyone other than reality buffs give a damn.

There's a lot of in-between stuff, but maybe this is too long already. End of the line came as Kefauver (and that element of our society which blessed with our great human freedoms can't wait to end them in authoritarianism) made still another bid to squelch the First Amendment with utterly idiotic charges, which are now being laid against television. That maybe, is the justice. Television made saints and saviors out of Kefauver and that fraud Wertham, and his ghosted book with its manipulations, and tried to show us all as bad guys. Now it's <u>their</u> turn! But no one benefits except those who hope to be well-paid censors.

In fact Bill had won, and considering what's being done now, EC's worst is kindergarten stuff. In fact, the mail EC got would have been enough to swamp the censor groups if it had been given public exposure, for fans took everything tongue in cheek! They challenged Al on his snap endings. He and Bill would

delight over a lot of intelligent, bright input, at times redoing a story seemingly incorporating a fan's idea—then cackle as they threw another curve.

Since the EC era, all of us have met people at comic conventions who dug EC. Rather than filling prisons and asylums, it turns out they are functioning people in all walks of life, and for me, it's been a pleasure meeting them.

GEORGE EVANS

December 2, 1994

(Reprinted from CFA-APA #36)

The "Kamen" Babe

Jack Kamen has done it again! Another beautiful set of curves has flowed from his pen. This illustration was created just for the pages of *HORROR FROM THE CRYPT OF FEAR.*

A GOOD AND GENEROUS MAN

By Jack Kamen

Let this serve as my tribute to a good and generous man, William Gaines. I first met Bill Gaines when Al Feldstein brought me into the organization. Since Al lived in a neighboring community, many of my stories were explained, discussed and critiqued at his home. After completion he delivered them to the office in New York. It was an ideal situation for me and saved much time and commuting to the city. I did make occasional trips to the city, and a strong friendship developed between Al, Bill, and myself.

The ensuing years at EC were idyllic since I had freelanced for a number of other publishers. The security of having one good account was a godsend for a family man. Being a good friend of Bill Gaines and the times we "socialized" are amongst the greatest of my memories. As an employer, his creativity with Al, and his respect for the people who worked for him was not to be matched elsewhere in the business. I worked for most of the competition, but they didn't come close.

I remember so well the final days for me at EC. I knew the bad publicity at that time was preventing distribution of the books, but Bill felt a responsibility to a family man like myself with four children, and paid me for three months of art work that would probably never get printed.

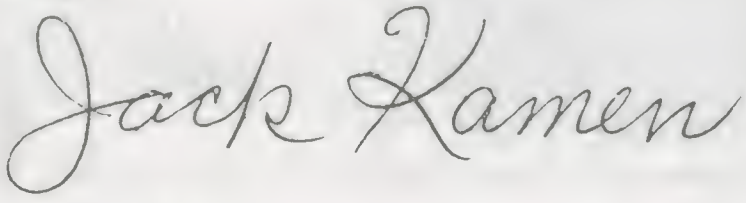
Fortunately, my transition to painting and drawings for advertising and corporate art was rapid and the days of 1954 were left behind. Even then, Bill and Al asked me to do some artwork for MAD, but I always felt the magazine would not be a good vehicle for what I did best. At that time, my rates were exceedingly higher than comic book pay, but I shall never forget that they tried to tailor material for me that could fit the format.

In recent years, and though there was never any kind of agreement, legal, oral, or otherwise, around Christmas time I would get considerable sums of money as royalties on work I had done as long as forty five years ago.

The last time I saw Bill was at one of his typical parties for friends and employees. Not surprisingly there were members of his old EC gang. It was held in one of the poshest places in New York City, the Trade Center's "Window on the World". My wife and I came in from New Hampshire in response to his invitation and were delighted to find so many of the old timers from my EC days, not affiliated with MAD.

Since the party occurred just a few months prior to his death, I have the strongest feelings that he did this as a fond farewell to the people he knew and loved. Needless to add, the party was one of the most sumptuous we have ever attended.

If there is a God in his heaven, he blessed this man, and we were blessed in knowing him.



November 8, 1994

(Reprinted from CFA-APA #36)

MARIE SEVERIN has a NIGHTMARE!
I THINK YOUR COLORING STINKS! I SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE ONE IN RED... A RICH PUCE OR ROSE MADDER GOING INTO A DEEP SEPIA!
DID ANYONE ASK US? OH NO! I'M IN A SILLY PROCESS BLUE! A SHROUD IN A LOVELY MUSTARD TONE WITH A HINT OF PAYNES GREY WOULD BE PERFECT!
WELL DON'T BE TOO UPSET DEARIE... YOU'LL BE STAYING WITH US TO RECOLOR THE WHOLE EC LINE.
SEVERIN
DR. MART N

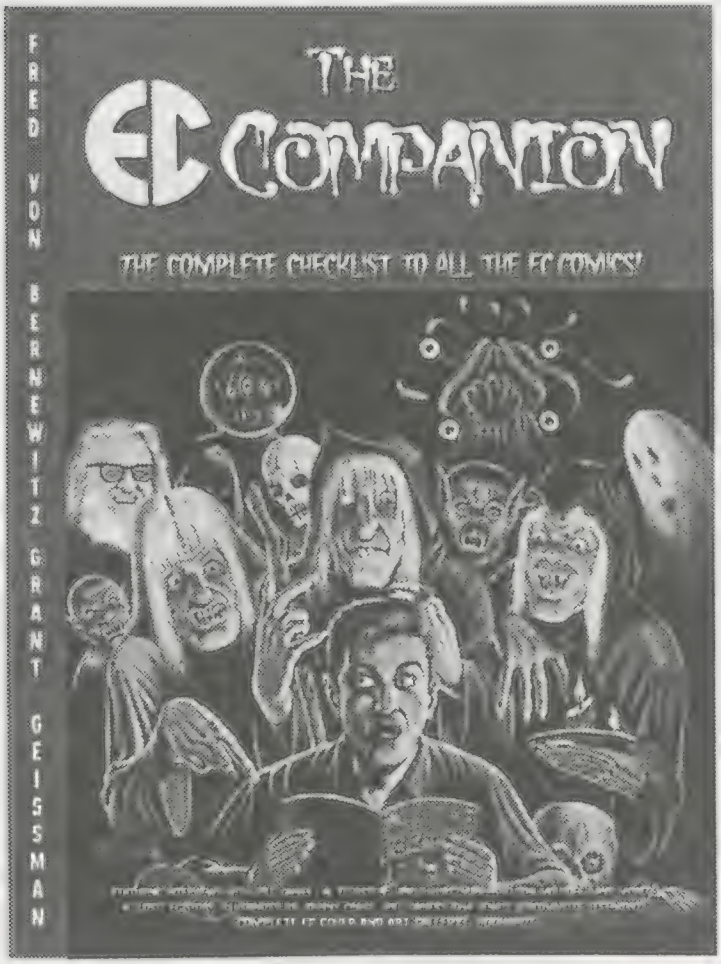
Marie Severin was kind enough to share one of her reoccurring EC nightmares with us. The Ghoulunatics can be so darn critical!!!

MAD artist, Sergio Aragones had me pose for this fun little drawing at a recent comic con. This puts a whole new meaning to the age old question, "Is it soup yet"?!

Artist/animator, Rich Dannys created this macabre graveyard scene by utilizing many familiar EC elements. The hanged man's face looks very familiar.....hmmmmm

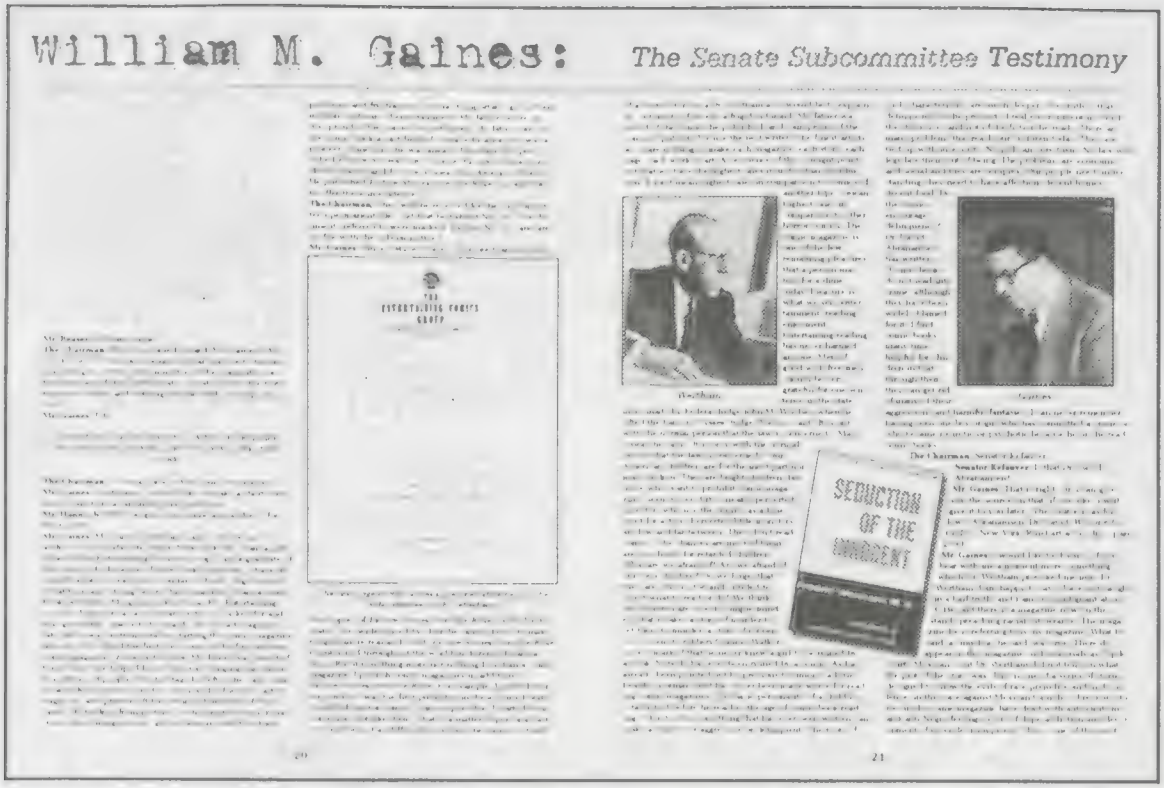
The EC Companion

As work on my *Collectibly MAD* book was winding down, I began to cast around for other book project ideas I could segue into. I hit upon the notion of doing an updated edition of Fred von Bernewitz's *Complete EC Checklist*, which was first issued in 1955. There had already been several editions of the book, but I wanted to present every cover image next to the information, and to flesh the book out with interviews and other features that had not been present in the original version. Besides, I reasoned, a project like this couldn't *possibly* take more than a year at most to complete; after all, much of the work had already been done by von Bernewitz. I contacted Fred and worked out a co-authorship agreement, and we were on our way. More than three years later, the book is nearly complete at last, and is scheduled to be released by the newly-resurrected Kitchen Sink Press in June, 1998.



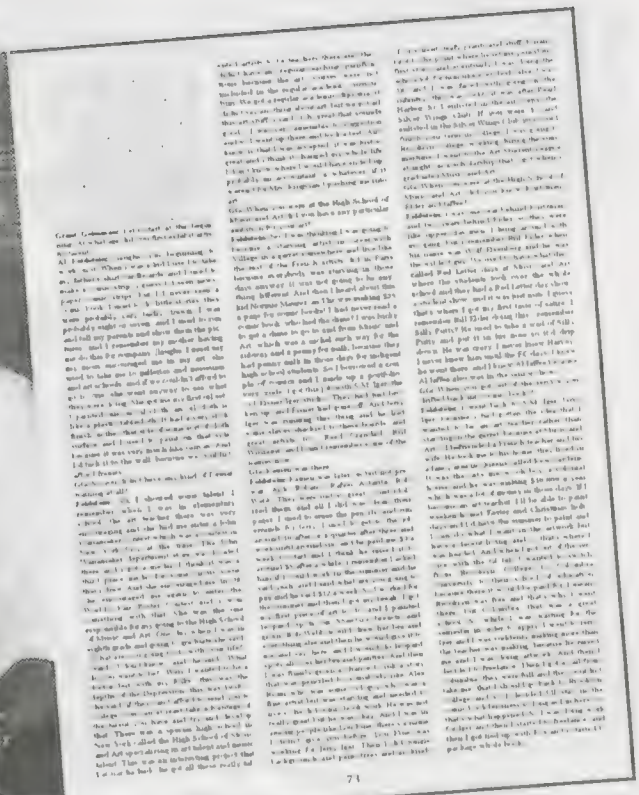
The title of this edition of the *Checklist* will be *The EC Companion*, which reflects the book's contents and format both literally and figuratively: it is sized to fit alongside the Russ Cochran *EC Library* hardbound sets. Adorning the cover of *The EC Companion* is an original oil painting by Al Feldstein, a modified version of the first EC horror annual.

Appearing for the first time in the *Checklist* is information on the writ-



ers for most of the New Trend stories, and for many of the Pre-Trend stories. Much of this information was researched by John Benson for his articles on EC's writers in *Squa Tront*. Additional information has been ferreted out, and both Al Feldstein and Johnny Craig have recently looked over their entire EC output in an attempt to identify which stories were theirs. Their comments appear as footnotes throughout. There are still a few question marks about who wrote what, but most of EC's stories have (at long last) been reunited with their authors.

Interviews done especially for the book include conversations with Fred von Bernewitz (talking about the genesis of the original *EC Checklist*), Adele Kurtzman, *Moon Girl* artist Sheldon Moldoff, Al Feldstein (a major interview that forms the backbone of the



WEIRD SCIENCE

#12. May — June 1950

Cover: Feldstein	
Feldstein	
Kurtzman	
Wood	
text	
Kamen	
text	
Feldstein	

#13. July — August 1950

Cover: Feldstein	
Feldstein	
Feldstein	
Harrison & Wood	
text	
Kamen	
text	
Kurtzman	

#14. September — October 1950

Cover: Feldstein	
Feldstein	
Kurtzman	
text	
Harrison	
letters	
Kamen	

#15. November — December 1950

Cover: Feldstein	
Feldstein	
Kurtzman	
text	
letters	
Ingels	
Kamen	

#5. January — February 1954

Cover: Feldstein	
Feldstein	
Wood	
text	
letters	
Kurtzman	
Jack & Dave Kamen	

#6. March — April 1952

Cover: Feldstein	
Feldstein	
Kurtzman	
text	
letters	
Wood	
Kamen	

#7. May — June 1952

Cover: Feldstein	
Feldstein	
Kamen	
text	
letters	
Kurtzman	
Wood	

#8. July — August 1952

Cover: Feldstein	
Feldstein	
Rousseau	
text	
letters	
Kamen	
Wood	

Al Feldstein

Bill Gaines

book), Nick Meglin on the "Fleagle Gang" of Frazetta, Williamson, Torres, Woodbridge, and Krenkel, and a vintage 1955 conversation with Bill Gaines.

Other features include the complete 1954 Bill Gaines/Senate Subcommittee testimony, an EC artist art and photo gallery, a complete index to every EC story title, and much more. Nearly half the book is in full color, and every EC cover (shot from copies of the original comics) is presented next to the information for that issue, in color. The interviews and other additional material appear in black and white.

John Benson dug up an unpublished Carl Wessler story synopsis (originally intended for the never-published *Vault of Horror* #41) and has been gracious enough to let us publish it, and Johnny Craig has been good enough to create wonderful pencil spot illustrations for it.

We are also reprinting in its entirety *Narrative Illustration*, M.C. Gaines's 1942 rare (and now pricey) treatise on comic books.

There are numerous vintage photos (and a few other surprises) in the book as well.

As the release date gets closer, you are invited to make your inquiries to Kitchen Sink Press about pricing, shipping date, and et cetera.

It is our sincere hope that *The EC Companion* will prove to be as indispensible to EC Fan-Addicts as the EC comics themselves. EC for me, see?

—Grant Geissman

Jas Ingram knows good reading when he sees it...sleep tight!!!!

TALES FROM THE CRYPT
PUPPETRONIC MOUTH-EYEBALL CONTROL
SPARE EYEBALLS
CECIL SUTTON '97

NOTES ON THE SECOND COMING

by The Old Witek

Several generations of readers owe a debt of gratitude to Russ Cochran for reprinting all of EC's "New Trend" comics in their original publication sequence. In the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties, when fans had to scrounge for a few random reprints that popped up intermittently, such a project seemed like an impossible dream. But here we are, actually nearing the end of Cochran's comprehensive reprint cycle--and what a great run it's been. Thanks, Russ, from all of us kiddies.

For better or for worse, I had the pleasure of buying ECs during their first and second comings. My first EC was **Vault Of Horror 17** (Feb. - Mar. '51), and I bought every issue of every series thereafter. Then, in 1956, I had a nightmare. I dreamed that the ghoulunatics were chasing me across my roof and, upon awakening--taking my dream as a symptom of serious mental disturbance--I got up and dumped all of my comics into the incinerator, hoping thereby to eliminate the source of my derangement. (I know what you're thinking: "What a schmuck!" But hey, I was 13 and being hostage to your hormones makes you do strange things--like question your sanity.)

By 1960 I realized that I had made a terrible mistake and set out to recover every EC ever published, a Herculean labor that took about 25 years to complete. Then the reprints came out, and I have them all, too. They comprise my reading copies while my originals molder in mylar.

There are obvious differences between the two editions. Originals measure 10 1/2 by 7 inches, and are printed in muddy, old-fashioned inks on cruddy paper. (Original Canadian editions printed from rubber plates look even worse.) Reprints measure a smaller 10 1/2 by 6 7/16 inches and use modern inks and better paper. Purists believe that the original colors are softer, more subtle. Others are perfectly happy with today's vivid inks and the sharper line art reproduction that is the result of superior, digitized four-color separation printing.

Missing from the reprints, however, are the first-run letters, artist profiles, original house ads, and cheapjack mail order ads.

In the Fifties, there were "97 pound weakling" Charles Atlas ads, and ads for Atlas's competition, the Jowett Institute. You could buy genuine imitation leopard or bamboo seat covers for your car, or an "all in one cigarette lighter and full pack case personalized with your name" for $1.98. Clip a coupon and you could become a "criminal investigator finger print expert," or start a "Quick-Cash spare time shoe business."

A new addition to Cochran's series is the art page. EC never printed reader art, but considering how inspirational EC art can be, publishing drawings by young readers is a nice touch.

Both editions of EC comics printed readers attempts at poetry, as well as heartfelt letters of praise and criticism. Both rated stories in previous issues--the difference being that EC did the ranking itself, while Gemstone elicits considerably more criticism from readers, some of whom seem compelled to critique every issue at length.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Comparing yesterday's and today's ECs raises an interesting question: Do second and third generation readers experience these comics differently? I think yes.

For one thing readers contemporaneous with the originals saw their own world reflected in ECs. Men in snap brimmed hats and baggy suits and women in flair skirts and pixy cuts are retro now, but in the Fifties, that's how people looked. Those who only know EC reprints look at these stories across a gulf of time and miss their immediacy.

When ECs were new they were very edgy, almost underground, and potentially dangerous, in ways we didn't fully understand then. Reading them was an illicit pleasure. Before Playboy and the sexual revolution made T&A as common as A&P, EC managed to be a hot girlie magazine for kiddies, right under the noses of inquisitors like the Roman Catholic Church's Legion Of Decency.

First generation readers never knew what was next. So we thrilled to new highs like the initial appearance of artwork by Bernie Krigstein, and were startled by rare lows like the publication of the so-called "New" **Two-Fisted Tales**. We never thought that we would wake up one day and discover that all the ECs but **MAD** were gone. At least modern readers have been given advanced warning.

The original letters columns created intimacy between readers and editors. The Old Witches Niche, the Vault Keeper's Corner and the Crypt of Terror promoted brand awareness and loyalty. Columns frequently featured playful bantering between editors and ghoulunatics along the line of radio's Jack Benny-Fred Allen and W.C. Fields-Charlie McCarthy feuds.

Through the letters columns we learned more about the "lives" and adventures of our bi-monthly hosts in horror, including such tidbits as how The Old Witch's Cauldron became a permanent part of **Tales From The Crypt**, and what became of Ghastly Graham Ingles when he was kidnapped by The Crypt Keeper and Vault Keeper.

Letters columns offered discount subscriptions for 75c, EC Fan Addict Club memberships and autographed ghoulunatic photos for a quarter, and, well--read this one and weep: *"In case you didn't catch ECs two 3-D magazines while they were languishing on the newsstands, the stockroom is now bulging with millions of copies for you unfortunate people who missed them. And have my idiot editors got an offer for YOU! You can now obtain THREE DIMENSIONAL EC CLASSICS (original newsstand price 25c) or THREE DIMENSIONAL TALES FROM THE CRYPT OF TERROR (ditto) for the absurd price of 15c each."* (**HOF 23**, Jan.-Feb. '54). Sigh!

Whether speaking as themselves or through their alter egos, the ghoulunatics, the voice in the letters pages was a genuine reflection of the men behind the mags, idiot editors Gaines and Feldstein. As they themselves put it in **VOH 29**, (Feb.-Mar. '53): *" In the past we have always tried to make you feel that you are all a personal part of the EC family. We have earnestly attempted to play things straight and honest with you, and have brought our problems to you when they arose."*

GONE! DISAPPEARED INTO THIN AIR!
I'M GETTING OUT OF HERE!
SUDDENLY, AS AL ... TERRIFIED... TURNS A CORNER IN THE TUNNELS...
GULP...OH!
COME IN! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU!
MEANWHILE, THE OTHER ONE, BILL, FINDS HIMSELF IN A STRANGE DIMLY-LIT ROOM...FACING HIS CAPTOR...
WHO... WHO ARE YOU?
I? I AM THE KEEPER OF THE CRYPT OF TERROR!
THE CRYPT OF WHAT?
TERROR! DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT TERROR IS?
YOU.. YOU'RE DARN TOOTIN' I DO... AND ..YOU .. YOU AREN'T H...H.. HELPING ME FORGET IT!
GOOD! I'VE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING YOU! I HAVE A PROPOSITION
WHILE AL... UP AHEAD IN THE STENCH-FILLED SEWER...
WHAT. DO YOU WANT WITH ME?
COME IN AND WE'LL TALK IT OVER! I .. AM THE KEEPER OF THE VAULT OF HORROR!
6

In Feldstein's **"HORROR BENEATH THE STREETS"** (**HOF** #17, 1950) both Gaines and Feldstein are seen playing themselves. While they are leaving the EC offices Bill brings up the topic of horror in comics. As they make their way into the night air they realize that they are being followed, so they hide themselves in the city sewer. Soon they are confronted by the Ghoulunatics and forced to sign contracts which state that EC will publish their horrible stories.

Gaines and Feldstein were straight and honest. They made it clear they were trying to make a buck. And the fact that they considered their readers as family was not an empty platitude. In his life's work, Bill Gaines demonstrated exceptional benevolence and integrity toward his colleagues and readers. At heart he remained the teacher he started out to be in life as we can see in the following instructions to readers from **TFTC 24**, (June-July '51): *"READ ALL THE CAPTIONS IN EC MAGAZINES AS WELL AS THE BALLOONS. They contain thrilling descriptions, important information pertaining to plot, and time sequences, etc. YOU CANNOT FULLY ENJOY . . . IN FACT YOU CANNOT FULLY UNDERSTAND OR FOLLOW ANY STORY WITHOUT THOROUGHLY READING EVERY WORD."* Further: *"My two idiot editors, Asinine Al and Revolting Willie . . .have begged me on their nubby knees to discuss with you a small matter of relatively no importance . . . some warped idea they have to allegedly help you to enjoy EC mags more. . . seems that those nefarious nuts have a notion that you fiendish fans are grabbing a glance at the last few panels on the last page of each story to see wha' hoppens. . . SHAME UPON YOU . . . I'm supposed to tell you that to fully ENJOY the trash I toss at you, START AT THE BEGINNING AND READ THROUGH TO THE END"* (**TFTC #29**, Apr.-May '52).

When Bill and Al had problems, which they had aplenty, they discussed them directly with readers through the letters pages. Here they are on quality control: *"Literally thousands of you have asked in your letters 1) Why we don't publish our entire line of seven magazines monthly, rather than bi-monthly. . .and 2) Why our books aren't 52 pages!*

"The main reason we cannot do either of these things is: TIME! It is virtually impossible for your editors to compile and edit more than three magazines of our present size each month. . . . If you are an EC fan it is for one reason only, we're sure! You demand high quality, well written stories. . .. and superior, imaginative art. As the situation now stands, our artists are turning out as much work as they can humanly handle! (Those poor guys haven't had vacations in over two years! Neither have we but who's complaining. We LOVE our work!)

". . . Another reason our books aren't 52 pages is MONEY! Frankly we can't afford to produce that size book and still maintain the stories and art we are now giving" (**TFTC 23**, Apr.-May '51).

On knock-offs: *"My cauldron and I are both STEAMING--MAD, that is! Some of the inmates of the Haunt Of Fear. . . have run into some pretty sad imitations of EC comic magazines. Now I don't object to competition! After all, this is a free country! BUT I DON'T WANT TO SEE ANY OF YOU FAITHFUL EC FANS MISLED INTO BELIEVING THAT THESE ARE EC MAGAZINES! . . . Any similarity that other magazines may start to show in title, words, character, or subject matter is PURELY INTENTIONAL! The success of EC magazines is known and other publishers would like to cash in on our hard work! DON'T BE FOOLED"* (**HOF 7**, May-June. '51).

"As I'm sure you've noticed, there has been a deluge of imitations on the stands making use of key EC title words such as TERROR, HORROR, FEAR, and WEIRD! While it's true that EC was the first to use these words. . . along with HAUNT, CRYPT, and VAULT. . . in the comic field these words cannot be registered. Any old slob can come along and use these words as long as he doesn't use them in the same combinations that EC has used them in its titles.

All I can ask you to do is open your bloodshot eyes, try and act clever, and look for the EC seal" (**TFTC 30**, June-July '52).

On comic book glut: *"For the last three years you readers have been good to us! We have prospered, grown, and now publish ten bi-monthlies. We were highly successful in horror, science fiction, and then in war comics. Our success led to other publishers loading the stands with their horror, sci-fi, and war comics to the extent that in September, 1952 there were over 500 different comic mags being published! . . . So the inevitable happened. Last March the comic industry began to collapse again under the weight of this impossible number of titles. At this writing (early October) the field is filled with rumors of publisher after publisher either going out of business or dropping titles. . . Why are we troubling you our readers with all this? Two reasons: first, to thank you. EC is a small outfit as comics outfits go. Our capital reserve is relatively small. IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THE FAITHFUL ISSUE AFTER ISSUE BUYING HABIT OF YOU READERS, EC WOULD HAVE GONE DOWN THE DRAIN. . . .Secondly, we are telling you all this because we want to ask a favor. . .KEEP BUYING EC MAGAZINES! Please don't misunderstand. We don't want a single reader to spend a single dime that he needs for anything important on an EC mag. But if you're planning to spend that dime on a comic mag, make it an EC! More than ever before we need your business"* (**VOH 29**, Feb.-Mar. '53).

On censorship: *"Comics are under fire. . .due to the efforts of various 'do-gooders' and 'do-gooder' groups, a large segment of the public is being led to believe that certain comic magazines cause juvenile delinquency, warp the minds of America's youth, and affect the development of the personalities of those who read them. Among these 'do-gooders' are: a psychiatrist who has made a lucrative career of attacking comic magazines, certain publishing companies who do not publish comics and would benefit by their demise, many groups of adults who would like to blame their lack of ability as responsible parents on comic mags instead of themselves, and various assorted headline hunters. These people are militant. They complain to local police officials, to local magazines retailers, to local wholesalers and to their congressmen. They complain and complain and threaten and threaten. Eventually, everyone gets frightened. The news dealer gets frightened. He removes the books from display. The wholesaler gets frightened. He refuses shipments. The congressmen get frightened. . .November is coming! They start an investigation. This wave of hysteria has threatened the very existence of the whole comic magazine industry"* (**TFTC 45**, Jan.-Feb. '55).

EC called upon readers who believed that comics were a "harmless entertainment" to express that view to the Senate Subcommittee On Juvenile Delinquency. Before the Civil Rights and Anti-War movements of years to come, Bill and Al were among the first in media to take youngsters serious enough to urge them to challenge government.

WHY? BECAUSE I'M YOUR MOTHER!

No amount of reader activism on EC's behalf could stem the wave of hysteria that ultimately overwhelmed the "New Trend". More influential than psychiatrist Frederic Wertham and Senator Estes Kefauver who headed the Senate's Subcommittee On Juvenile Delinquency, was the power of countless

mothers across America who knew that horror comics were evil, a communist plot, perhaps.

In **VOH 25** (June-July '52) the Vault Keeper's Corner published a letter by Mrs. Arline Grandon Phelan of Kansas City, Kansas that undoubtedly expressed the feelings of outraged moms coast to coast:

"I realize that you'll probably toss this letter into the waste basket as soon as you've read enough to know that this is a critical letter, and that it stands absolutely no chance of being printed in one of your magazines. But as a mother of three children ages 8, 11, and 15 I felt that I had to write anyway. From time to time our elder son has brought home copies of your shameful and horrid magazines. With the writing of this letter I have forbidden him to read any of them in the future. First of all I realize that you're in business to make money, but that's no reason for you to print such filth to contaminate the minds of children. Your horror books are disgraceful and your "science" books and war books aren't much better. Only a low type of person could derive any enjoyment from such trash. How you call them 'comic' books is beyond me. I'm sure that if there were less magazines like yours there would be less crime and juvenile delinquency in this country. I heartily agree with attempts to outlaw 'comic books' such as yours."

EC responded eloquently and its readers profusely, but to no avail. In the context of paranoid, proper, mainstream 1950s America, Mrs. Phelan was right: EC horror comics were filth. That's why we loved them. They cut across the grain. Arguments about freedom of expression and the value of horror and sci-fi stories as literature were beside the point, because at heart subversive ECs clashed with the proprieties that shored up America's moms and dads. And so EC was doomed.

Final issues ran full page editorials by Bill and Al under the headline: IN MEMORIAM: *". . .Although we at EC still believe, as we have in the past, that the charges against horror and crime comics are utter nonsense, there's no point of going into a defense of this kind of literature at the present time. Economically our situation is acute. Magazines that do not get onto newsstands do not sell. We are forced to capitulate. We Give Up. WE'VE HAD IT!*

"Naturally, with comic magazine censorship now a fact, we at EC look forward to an immediate drop in the crime juvenile delinquency rate of the United States. We trust there will be fewer robberies, fewer murders, fewer rapes" (**TFTC 46**, Feb.-Mar. '55).

It would take more than a decade for the country to absorb and reflect the attitude Bill and Al conveyed through the letters pages. It was an attitude that amplified pop culture's dark side. EC's sex and violence, its pervading sense of doom, and its outspokenness challenged the status quo as only beatnik poets were doing at the time.

Today it may be hard to understand that what EC accomplished was unprecedented. We had not yet been saturated with countless slasher films and other gory entertainment. Although murder and mayhem was in the news regularly, there was just not that much of it compared to now. The expression "serial killer" had not yet been coined, and many slept with their doors unlocked and their keys in the Buick Special.

Catalyzed by the horrors of World War II and H-Bomb, EC recognized how gory our psyches were, and struck a responsive chord. But it was a different kind of gore than we have become inured to, it was a cutting edge metaphor for

The whole EC Gang is along for a holiday ride as Jolly Ol' Bill Gaines rolls out the Seasons Greetings to its loyal readership.

amorphous horror behind the nylon veil of Fifties propriety. Unlike the heartless, mechanical, gruesomeness in comics and movies today, ECs was tempered with humor, Old Testament morality, and affection. No one has put it more touchingly than reader Richard Jaeger in a letter to a recent Cochran reprint: *"I feel that The Old Witch is a special person. I feel that she has a heart. . . she teaches us that THE HAUNT OF FEAR is an adult dimension that she can put into her own perspective, and thus make it less terrible for us children. We know that she really loves us and for our sake will regularly come out of THE HAUNT to help her little friends."*

EC LIVES AGAIN...AND AGAIN!

Even after the demise of the "New Trend," letter writers carry on a conversation with EC comics as if these comics themselves were human beings, which in a sense they are. They are Bill and Al, who loved ECs enough to be consumed by them, which gave their mags a life of their own. But it wasn't smooth sailing. In the era of the House Un-American Activities Committee and red-baiting Senator Joe McCarthy, anything against the grain could be interpreted as a commie plot. And who but godless communists seeking to corrupt American youth would publish "comic" book stories about suburban husbands roasting on their own barbecues, war stories showing that war has no winners, trouble-making exposes of racism, police brutality, mob violence, and anti-semitism?

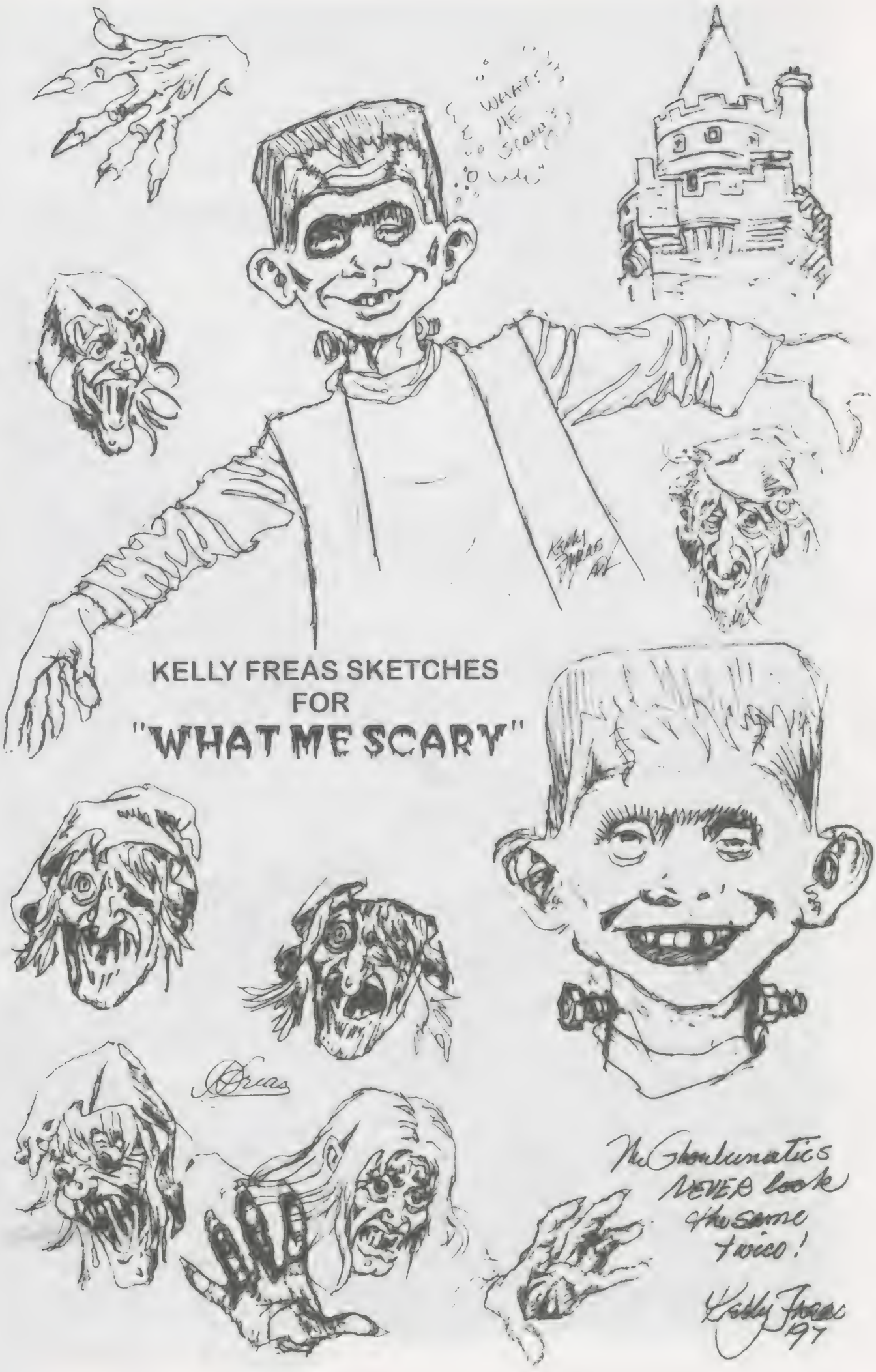
To provide some perspective on the mood of the times, let me quote **Harper's Magazine** former editor-in-chief, Willie Morris: *"It would be understandably difficult for the young American of the 1990s to comprehend the horrendous fears of international Communism in the 1950s, the inexorable red tide moving across the globe from Vietnam to the Philippines...and finally, for all one knew, to Kansas City, and the satisfying notion that the United States represented the paradigm of virtue against the monolithic evil, as if all history had achieved its happy culmination in the modern American commonwealth. It was, as John Foster Dulles popularized it, Christians versus the anti-Christ, Communism was a heightening menace not merely to the Western hegemony, but to Christianity itself"* (**New York Days**, 1993).

Like Alan Ginsburg and Lenny Bruce, Bill and Al were revolutionaries—and Jewish revolutionaries to boot. It was one thing for the goyim to make waves, quite another thing for high-profile Jews, who were always in jeopardy of being fingered as part of the apocryphal "Jewish-Communist Conspiracy."

But the idiot editors came from a generation of overcomers who survived the 1930s Depression and history's most killing conflict. They came of age when Christians and Jews died together on the sulfurous sands of Iwo Jima and in the mud of Bastogne, and they were not about to stifle themselves in peacetime New York.

When Bill and Al took to their desks in the old Il Progresso building at 225 Lafayette Street they had over a thousand stories to tell that bespoke their passions, truths, sarcasms, indignations, nightmares, and humors. If enough love, passion and courage can turn a comic mag into a human being, rest assured that EC comics are Bill Gaines and Al Feldstein.

Through their first and second comings and, yea, even unto future comings, generations shall continue to talk with Bill and Al forever. Amen.


WHAT'S
ME
SCARY?
KELLY FREAS SKETCHES
FOR
"WHAT ME SCARY"
The Ghoulunatics
NEVER look
the same
twice!
Kelly Freas
97

WHAT ME SCARY

BY KELLY FREAS

I just have to pretend to be stupid, that's all...
The Confluentes - how do we want to see these weirdos?
Snatch? Who?

TO BILL LEACH MAD-LY!
BILL GAINES
WHAT ME
ARAGONES

MATT KIMBLE
'97

This homage to EC artist Basil Wolverton was created by his son, Monte, just for this issue. Monte said, "The barbecue pit is inspired by a panel from one of my Dad's Marvel science fiction stories from the early fifties: *WHERE MONSTERS DWELL*. It always scared/fascinated me when I was a little kid".

EC'S NEGLECTED MASTERWORK

by David R. Burlington

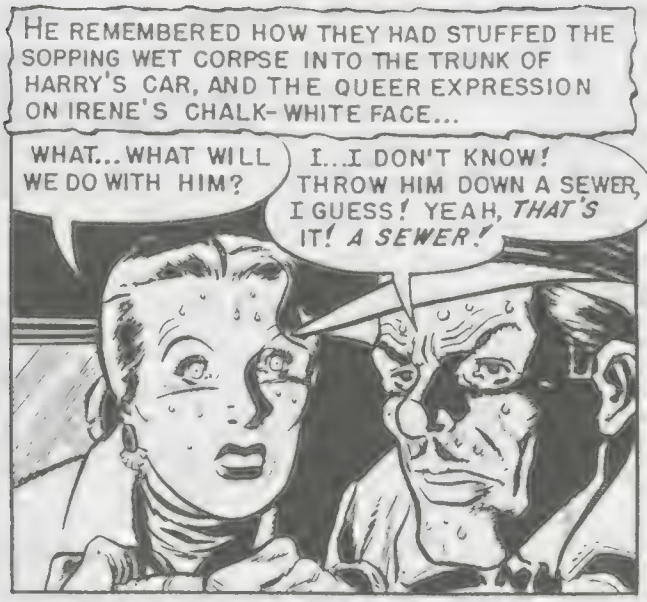
While EC's horror and science fiction generates most of today's fan interest, EC aficionados should not overlook **Crime Suspenstories**. This title's twenty-seven-issue run (from Oct. – Nov. 1950 through Feb. – Mar. 1955) contains some of EC's best plots, as well as impeccable art from Kamen, Crandall, Evans, Ingels, and Craig. This title was Johnny Craig's only continuing New Trend assignment besides his regular **Vault of Horror** stint.

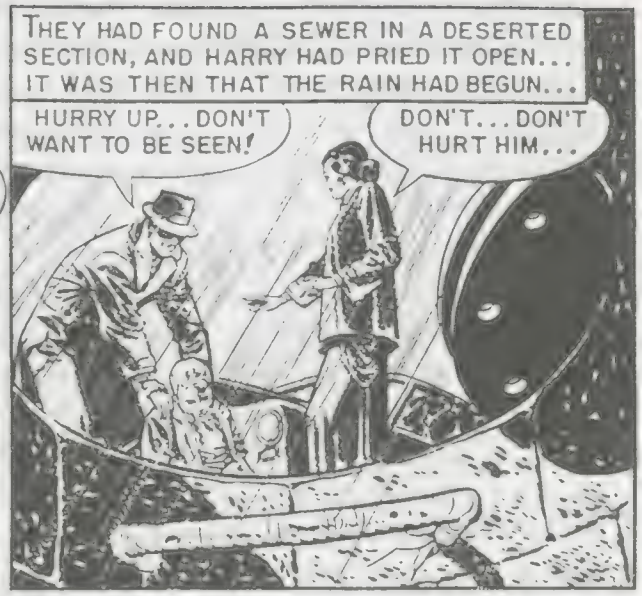
The usual **Crime Suspenstories** format was a cover and lead story by Craig, who wrote as well as drew his stories. Al Feldstein wrote the other three stories in each issue, at least until early to mid-1954, when he and publisher Bill Gaines turned to outside writers, especially Otto Binder and Carl Wessler. Issues 3 through 16 all contain a typical EC horror tale as well, hosted by the Old Witch. These were identical to her tales in **The Haunt of Fear**, published simultaneously with **CSS**. Seeing the popularity of his horror comics, perhaps Gaines wanted a conventional EC horror tale in **CSS** to help insure healthy sales. He and Feldstein frequently adapted Ray Bradbury's stories in their science fiction and horror lines. A few Bradbury suspense tales also show up in **Crime Suspenstories**, notably "The Screaming Woman" in issue #15.

It is obvious to any cinema buff that Feldstein and Craig were trying for a film noir type atmosphere in **CSS**. From the mid-1940's through the 1950's film noir was a bleak, existential school of filmmaking that examined crime, murder, betrayal, and what would then have been called "life in the raw". While EC crime tales played upon plot elements and visual motifs of film noir, those movies were in turn influenced by novels and short stories of the 1930's and 1940's, most notably by authors Raymond Chandler and James M. Cain. Cain in particular is by far the biggest **CSS** influence; his stories usually deal with one spouse trying to murder the other out of hatred, revenge, for money, or to clear the path for another lover. Craig and Feldstein used these elements again and again. One of the most famous film noir movies is "The Postman Always Rings Twice." A 1946 release, it was directed by Tay Garnett directly from the Cain novel by the same name. A comic fan watching the movie today would see an EC Crime Suspenstory come to life. The ultimate film noir of all time is "Double Indemnity", a 1944 release directed by Billy Wilder and starring Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray. Wilder used visual techniques that clearly influenced Johnny Craig as he created some of his **CSS** classics.

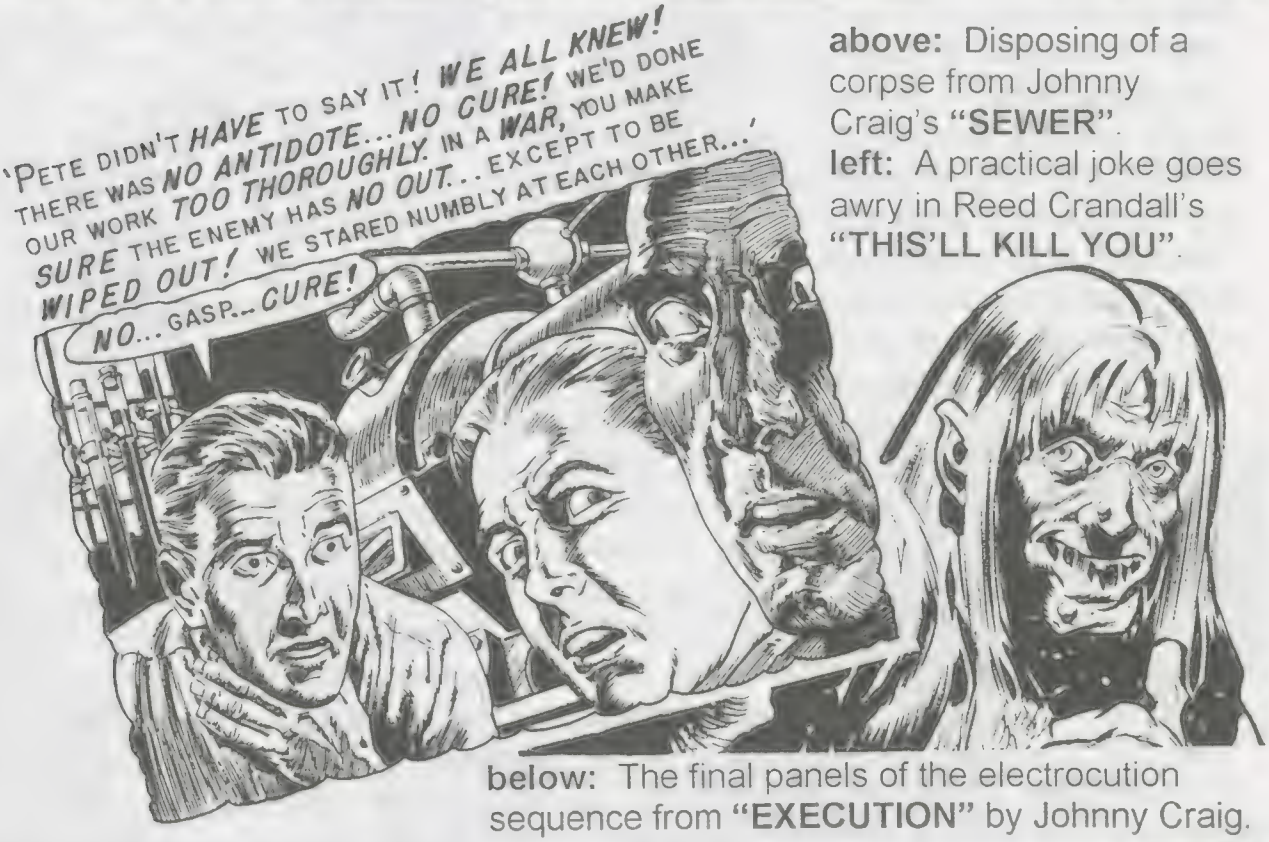
Craig's plots for **Crime Suspenstories** revolve around moral decay, deception, and especially paranoia. In his stories, the protagonist is always his own worst enemy. Dripping with flop sweat, the husband, wife, or paramour comes up with a devilishly clever plan to bump off the problem spouse. However, one small detail, an unforeseen development, or simple fate always intervenes to derail the cleverest plot. In EC's patented twist endings, the schemer ends up trapped in his own web, usually to die a horrible death. EC is famous for these "snap" endings in their horror stories, but they are just as prevalent, and often even more clever, in **CSS**. Feldstein's crime plots were quite similar.

Extremely effective film noir techniques can be found in "The Execution" in **CSS** #12. In this surreal nightmare, a case of mistaken identity leads an

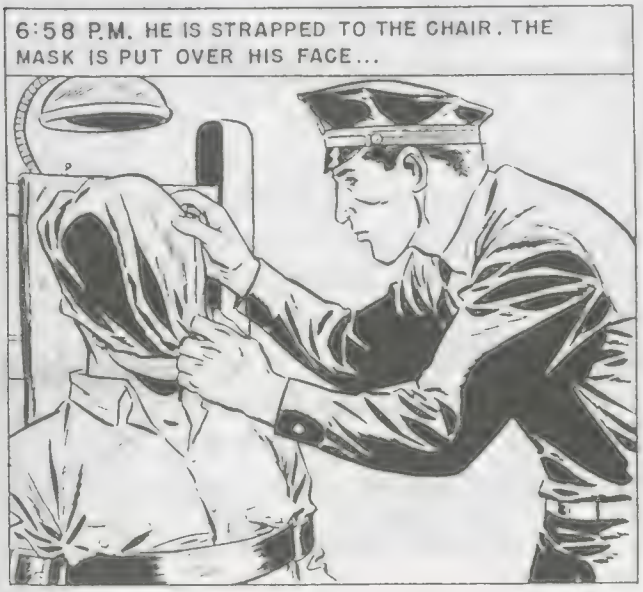

HE REMEMBERED HOW THEY HAD STUFFED THE SOPPING WET CORPSE INTO THE TRUNK OF HARRY'S CAR, AND THE QUEER EXPRESSION ON IRENE'S CHALK-WHITE FACE...
WHAT... WHAT WILL WE DO WITH HIM?
I...I DON'T KNOW! THROW HIM DOWN A SEWER, I GUESS! YEAH, THAT'S IT! A SEWER!

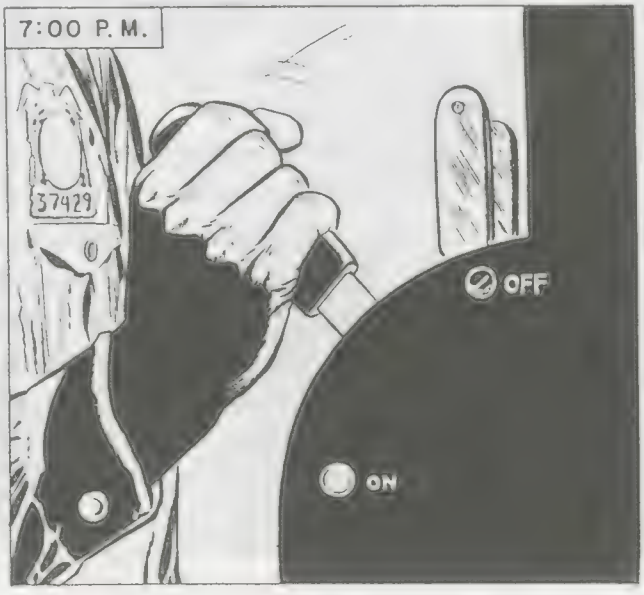

THEY HAD FOUND A SEWER IN A DESERTED SECTION, AND HARRY HAD PRIED IT OPEN... IT WAS THEN THAT THE RAIN HAD BEGUN...
HURRY UP... DON'T WANT TO BE SEEN!
DON'T... DON'T HURT HIM...

above: Disposing of a corpse from Johnny Craig's **"SEWER"**.
left: A practical joke goes awry in Reed Crandall's **"THIS'LL KILL YOU"**.


'PETE DIDN'T HAVE TO SAY IT! WE ALL KNEW! THERE WAS NO ANTIDOTE... NO CURE! WE'D DONE OUR WORK TOO THOROUGHLY. IN A WAR, YOU MAKE SURE THE ENEMY HAS NO OUT... EXCEPT TO BE WIPED OUT! WE STARED NUMBLY AT EACH OTHER...'
NO... GASP... CURE!

below: The final panels of the electrocution sequence from **"EXECUTION"** by Johnny Craig.





innocent man to the electric chair. The tension builds palpably as Craig shows us the preparations for his execution, with the one man capable of proving the prisoner's innocence only a few feet away, blissfully ignorant of the problem. Another acknowledged film noir masterpiece is "D.O.A". This 1950 film stars Edmond O'Brien as a man dying of a slow-acting poison who has time to solve his own murder. A variation on this theme turns up in "This'll Kill You" in **CSS** #23. Beautifully illustrated by Reed Crandall from an Otto Binder script, it depicts an April Fool's Day joke gone horribly awry. This is one of the many **Crime Suspenstories** adapted on HBO's "Tales From the Crypt" television series. That same issue has to be one of EC's most bizarre plots (and that is certainly saying something). In "Standing Room Only," a transvestite murders his sister and her wealthy husband only to be found out when he/she is seen walking into the men's rather than the ladies' room!

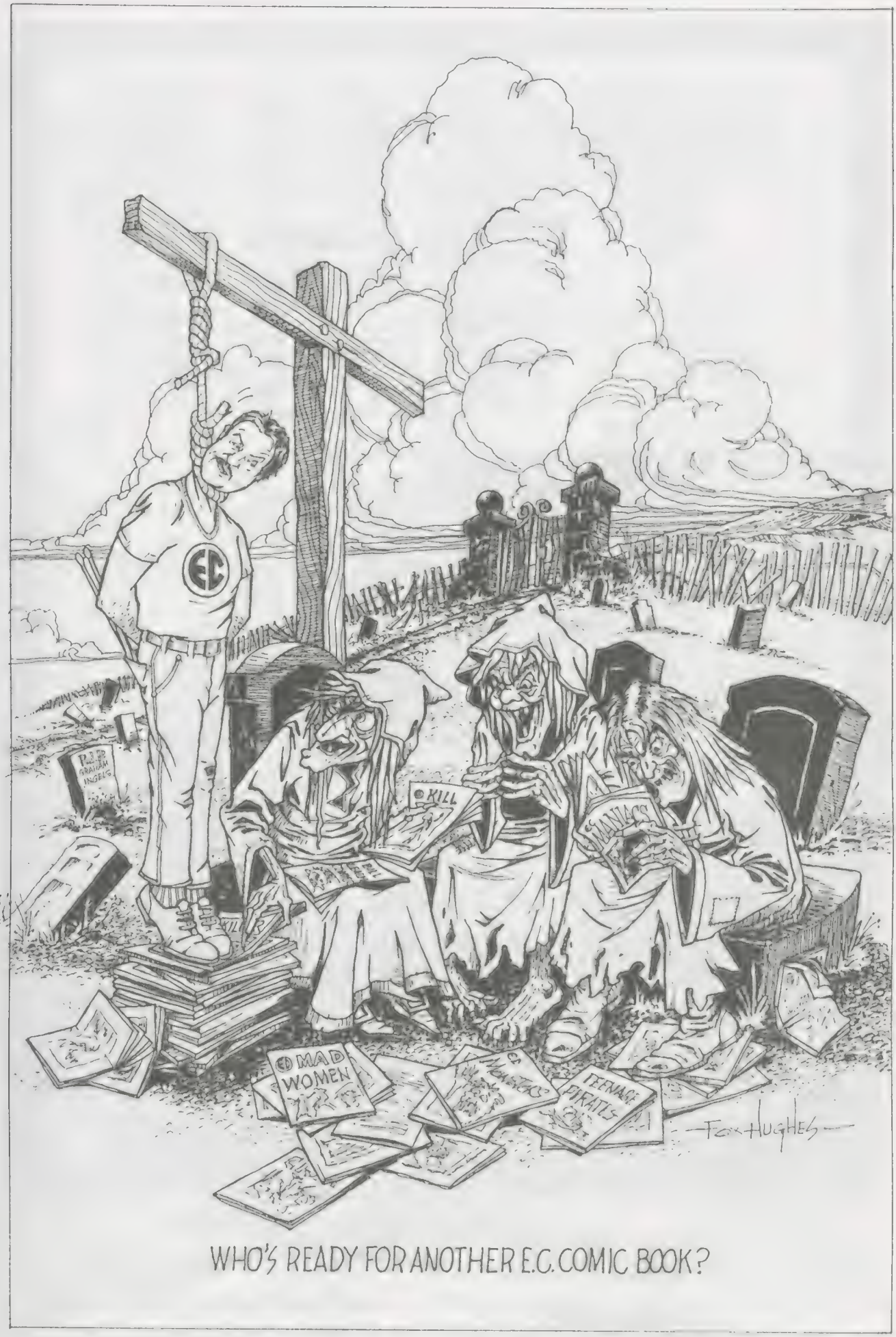
Many fans know of Dr. Fredric Wertham's crusade against comic books, which led to U.S. Senate hearings and an intense anti-comics backlash. Wertham's book, "Seduction of the Innocent", featured the infamous hanging cover from **CSS** #20 among its illustrations. Ironically, the one comic that gave Bill Gaines the most trouble while before the Senate subcommittee was not his horror comics but **Crime Suspenstories** #22. That Craig cover shows a man holding a bloody axe in one hand and his wife's severed head in the other, while her decapitated body lies nearby. This issue held aloft by senators who grilled Gaines as to how in the world he could publish such ghoulish material for children. This author has the good fortune to have had an ongoing written correspondence with Mr. Craig for the past several years. To this day, he has ambivalent feelings about this cover.

Much more positive are Craig's feelings about his story "Sewer" in **CSS** #5. In this tale of murder gone wrong, Craig stated he feels he came very close to hitting the mark of exactly how he pictured the tale in his mind. Noirish lighting effects, rain-slicked streets, and overflowing sewer grates highlight the visuals. Cinematic touches abound in many **CSS** tales, including an ingenious "time stands still" effect on page six of "Backlash" in issue #4. Yet another film noir stereotype is the veil femme fatale. Perhaps Graham Ingels should have been used more often in this title, given his work in "Heads UP", also found in issue #4. The tale's wanton and wicked Dora, while voluptuous, has an overripe and unwholesome quality perfect for film noir. The noir mainstay of bizarrely lit extreme facial close-ups is shown to good effect by Jack Kamen in " Medicine" in **CSS** #9. Whether cinematically influenced or not, this title featured some of EC's best art. Al Williamson and Frank Frazetta collaborated to great effect in the story "Fired!" in **CSS** #17.

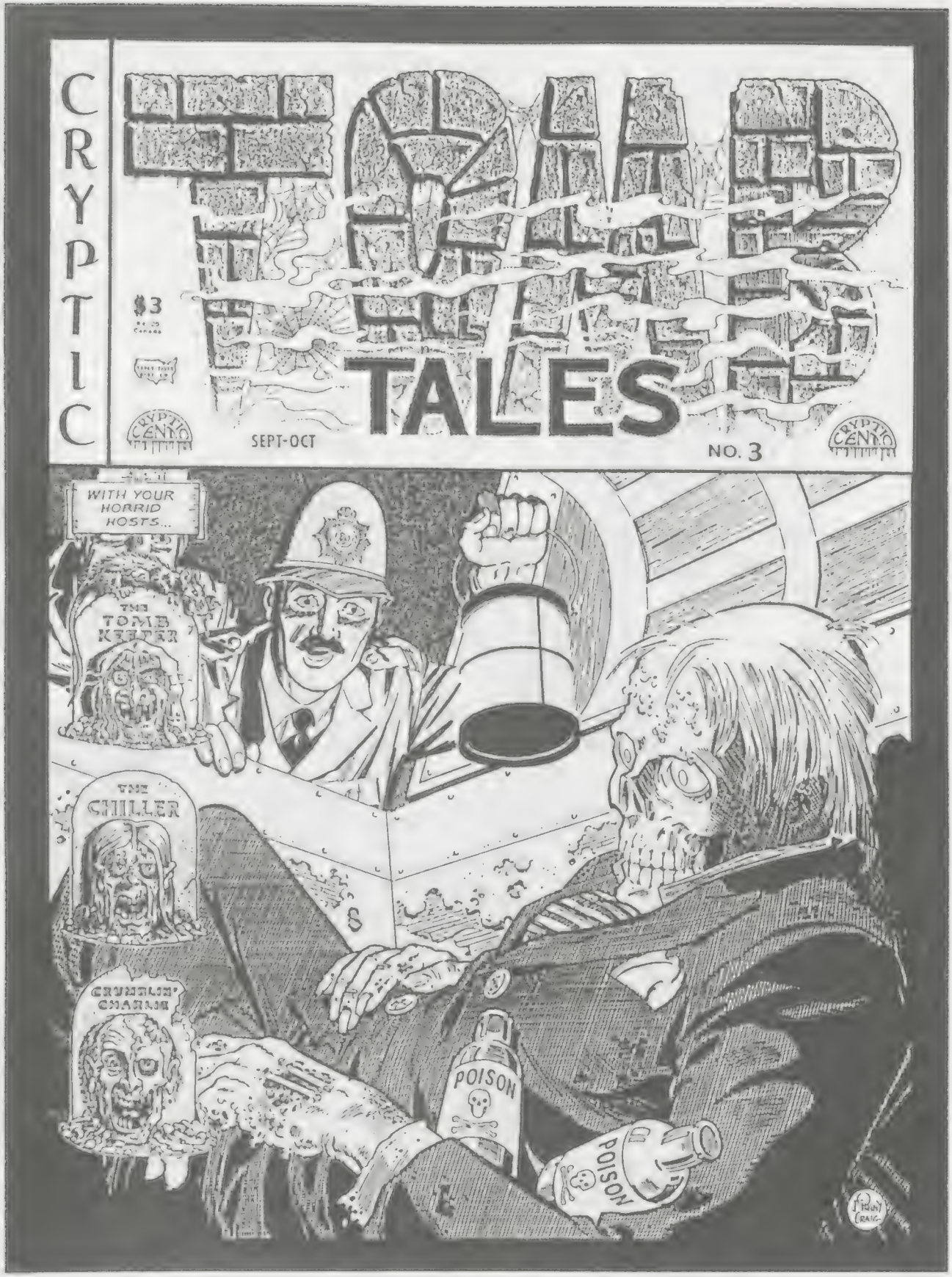
Crime Suspenstories' final issue was #27, on the stands in late 1954. The same backlash that decimated EC's horror comics killed off their crime title as well. However, it certainly went out with a bang and not a whimper, artistically speaking. That issue's "Just Her Speed" drawn on Bernie Krigstein, uses his famed multi-panel technique to perfection. The story's setting is a lonely roadside diner; similar to the one used to great effect in the film noir classic "Gun Crazy". That 1950 release was an adaptation of a **Saturday Evening Post** short story. These must have been just the types of films and prose that influenced Gaines and Feldstein, leading them to the creation of their oft-forgotten EC crime treasure.

above: Time stands still for the murderer in Johnny Craig's **"BACKLASH"**.
Left: Williamson and Frazetta create a very sexy confrontation in **"FIRED"**.
below: Jack Kamen's splash from **"MEDICINE"** is just what the doctor ordered.

The Crypt and Vault Keepers don't seem to mind that The Old Witch has spilled the last few swallows of her "Beauty Potion". Artist Ken Hooper didn't have the heart to give her a new face. I guess some thing will never change...and probably shouldn't!



Illustrator/animator, Fox Hughes got a kick out of putting my neck on the line during this humorous Ghoulunatic reading session.



TOMB TALES is a must for all of you EC FANADDICTS. Issue #3 (above) has a great cover by Johnny Craig and a memorial page to HFTCOF founder, Sam Kingston. George Evans drew the cover for the first issue, followed by Jack Kamen on issue #2. John Severin's art can be seen on issue #4. Future issues will include cover art by Al Williamson and Jack Davis.

Hellboy Junior spends a little time with The Old Witch in this specialty drawing courtesy of MAD Magazine artist Bill Wray.

Founder of the *School Of Ugly Art*, alternative artist BOB X put his pen to work on another one of his famous "UGLY" faces.

©'97

SUPERIOR TO WHAT?

by Ken Kaffke

Why should a loyal EC Fan-Addict give more than a passing glance to the many imitators of EC's legendary New Trend? I have never heard anyone claim the fifties produced a better line of horror comics than EC. To be quite sure, most of the bandwagon jumpers offered at best, a garish cover and interior pages with a fleeting thrill of unimaginative swipes of EC art and stories.

After years of sifting through rotting pulp, I have found a few excellent competitors who seem to have sporadically veered close to EC's high standards. Usually these flashes of brilliance were rendered by talents who would eventually do their best work for EC.

George Evans' first pre-code horror art was for FAWCETT's **THIS MAGAZINE IS HAUNTED** and **WORLDS OF FEAR.** Reed Crandall did a pair of beautifully horrific stories for STANDARD's **OUT OF THE SHADOWS #9** (July 1953) and Frank Frazetta's sole pre-code horror cover was for TROJAN's **BEWARE #10** (July 1954).

One notable fifties publisher of low-budget horror comics produced the closet thing possible to EC...actual EC comic books! Based in Toronto, SUPERIOR concurrently printed Canadian editions of most, but not all, EC titles from 1948 – 1954. During the fifties the import and sale of American comics into Canada was not allowed. Reprints were legal if the printing was done within Canada. After duplicate plates were struck from the original American plates SUPERIOR supplied the Canadian market with their own EC comics...all in color for a dime.

You may have gotten stuck with one of these somewhat inferior printings at sometime, as I did, without realizing it right away. The covers look virtually the same, but finally it dawns on you that the little circles on the cover contain a maple leaf instead of the EC logo! Also, the interior printing is splotchy. It's hard to make out the text or see the art in sharp detail. Perhaps like me, you were in a big hurry to find the party who sold it to you without mentioning it was a Canadian edition! Undoubtedly, they are scarcer than American printings. Rarest of all the Superior EC's are the three issues of "**WEIRD SUSPENSTORIES**", a true oddity released as such because even before the comics code took effect here in the United States, Canada forbade use of the word "CRIME" on the titles of comic books. Apparently, an issue of **TRUE CRIME** was reprinted in Canada in 1949 and caused an uproar. The Jack Cole story with living people being dragged by cars over rough roads was just too much for them. **WEIRD SUSPENSTORIES #1-3** are identical to **CRIME SUSPENSTORIES** except that the word "WEIRD" was cut from **WEIRD SCIENCE** and sloppily pasted over the word "CRIME". These issues are listed in the Overstreet Guide but no prices are given.

Fortunately for horror comic aficionados, Superior Publishers, Ltd. wasn't merely a reprint house. Rather than copy the EC formula, Superior's three titles (intended for the American market) **JOURNEY INTO FEAR, STRANGE MYSTERIES**, and **WEIRD MYSTERIES** featured many highly original and downright immoral stories. EC's tales of terror nearly always showed the bad guy getting their just desserts in the final panels, often by means of wildly clever turnabout situations. Most of the time Superior also punished its bad guys. But, from time to time, the good guy was done away with for good measure, so

"CRAWLING EVIL", JOURNEY INTO FEAR #10, 1952

These panels from SUPERIOR prove that their comics were capable of entertaining its readers. But this particular story is one of its better attempts at imitating an EC.

SO LOOM GOES HER WAY! PARIS, ROME, NAPLES AND — AT LAST NEW YORK AGAIN...
WORMS! FOOLS! DIE, ALL OF YOU! I LOVE TO HEAR YOU SQUISH UNDER MY FOOT! HAH-HAH-HAH—

THERE'S STILL A FLICKER OF LIFE! THERE MAY STILL BE A CHANCE FOR... THIS... TWINS...
I WARN YOU, DARLING... THERE'S A LIMIT TO WHAT EVEN PLASTIC SURGERY CAN DO. WHAT YOU SEE WON'T BE VERY PRETTY, AND WE HAD TO AMPUTATE YOUR LEG...
GET OUT! GET OUTTT!!!
YAIEEEE!
I CAN'T STAND LOOKING AT THAT GHASTLY MASK THEY CALL A "FACE"!!... I--I DON'T WANT TO LIVE! (SOB)...(SOB)...
NO! I WON'T KILL MYSELF! WHY SHOULD I? HA! HA! HA!
THERE'S SOMETHING SWEETER EVEN THAN DEATH, FOR AN OBSCENITY LIKE ME. REVENGE... HA! HA! HA!... REVENGE ON THE BRUTAL, COLD-BLOODED MONSTER WHO STOLE MY ELLEN AND RUINED MY LIFE!
REVENGE! DEATH! MURDER! HATE! KILL! SLAY! TORTURE! REVENGE! REVENGE!!!

"REVENGE CAN BE FATAL", STRANGE MYSTERIES #10,1953

nobody prevailed in the end! Also, Superior didn't have hosts popping in at the end with puns to let you know it was all a sick joke. Superior was just plain sick!

EC's stories were more professionally written, but the Superior line made an honest effort to present tales that took some thought. Superior's stories are still quite readable; more than can be said for most of the Atlas, Gilmor, and various other pre-code horror publishers that were cashing in on the horror theme with little concern for substance. Nevertheless, Superior's unpredictable plot twists aren't easy to summarize. I'd advise EC fans to read a few of the best Superior comics for themselves.

One of the better stories is "Revenge can be Fatal" in **STRANGE MYSTERIES** (#10, March 1953): A Scientist is shoved into skin-searing solvent by his wife and her lover. The same lover later stabs the wife. As she is dying she tells her disfigured husband that she'd rather be stabbed again than be with him. She dies, then the lover dies of natural causes, before the now totally insane scientist can take his revenge. He digs up the lovers corpse and reanimates him, in order to kill him again. The lover murders the scientist instead, laughing at the "chump" who brought him back to life! End of story...

It must be admitted that not every issue of Superior's 53 horror comics is as memorable. Perhaps only 20 of the 200 original tales could be classified as bonafide chiller dillers. Superior's first and final years, 1951 and 1954, are marked by uninspired, run-of-the-mill tales featuring haunted houses, ghosts and criminals. Overall, Superior's middle years, 1952 and 1953, are well worth reading. Here are three standout stories from **JOURNEY INTO FEAR**:

"PARTNERS IN BLOOD" which features a female vampire putting the bite on a woman, turning her into a vampire who suddenly gets the hots for a hunchbacked dwarf! (Journey Into Fear #6, March 1952).

"CRAWLING EVIL" is about a beautiful witch who turns men into little worms with human heads, and then she squashes them with her stylish high heels! (Journey Into Fear #10, November 1952).

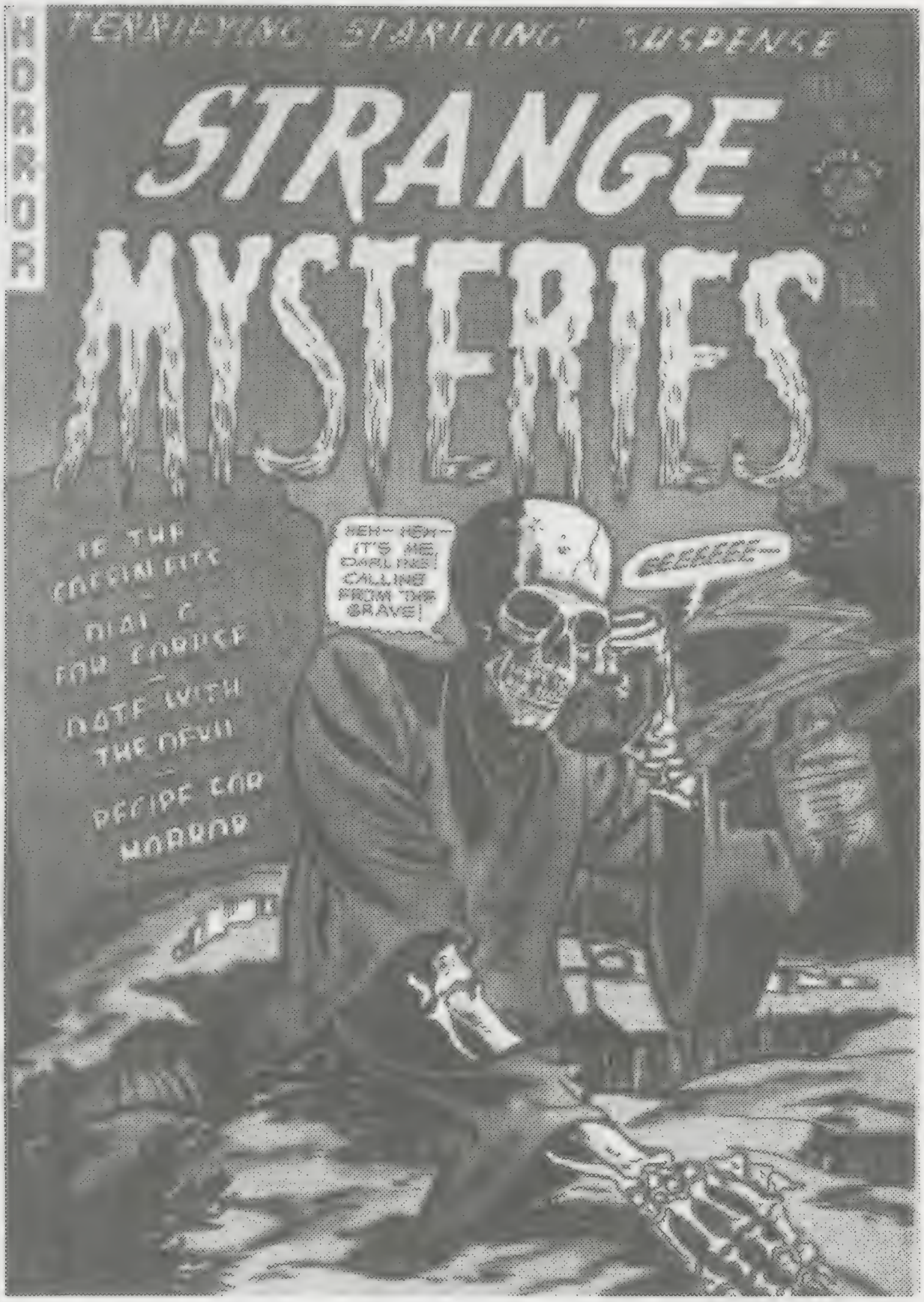
"EVIL INTRUDER" is an ugly and crude alien who puts an earth girl in a trance-like state so that he can kiss her but his lurid, insulting come-ons finally shock her back to reality...(Journey Into Fear #12, March 1953).

The artwork in Superior's horror titles is vastly inferior to EC, though I find it charming and expressive of the dark, foggy fifties... in a manner different enough from EC to be very refreshing. The Iger Studio created nearly all of Superior's output. This was an assembly line bullpen of work-for-hire artists that included Matt Baker, Jack Kamen, Reed Crandall, Bob Webb, and George Tuska. Matt Baker's art appears in **Journey into Fear #1**, and is reprinted in **Strange Mysteries #19**, which also includes a panel by Baker blown-up for the cover. Most of the art created by the Iger Shop in the early fifties has a house-look that makes it difficult to distinguish the various artists.

As for the names of Superior's writers, the only information I have is that about half of Iger's scripts in the early fifties were written by Ruth Roche. Iger Studios also supplied art for Ajax-Farrell's fifties horror titles: **VOODOO**, **HAUNTED THRILLS**, **FANTASTIC FEARS** and **STRANGE FANTASY** for which Ruth Roche was the editor.

It is hoped that further research will bring forth more details about the Toronto, Ontario based company. In the meantime, reading Superiors won't hurt you, despite numerous depictions of "headlights", beheadings, dismemberment,

hypodermics, brain transplants, demonic possession, catfights, stabbings, acid-in-the-face, eye injuries, skull-cleaving, bare legs and lingerie!



A TYPICAL SUPERIOR HORROR COVER FROM 1953

Notice the Canadian Maple leaf logo. Definitely not a genuine EC!

TALES
CRYPT
RICK
OLSON

Bill Stout's tribute to "BRAIN FOOD" is enough to raise the dead. Stout is no stranger to the world of EC. His designs were used to create the recent Ghoulunatic statues. His work has also been featured on the cover of Comics Journal for two of their special EC issues.

The fantastic talent at EC during the fifties does not need to be spelled out...but illustrator Ed Fields couldn't help himself.

JACK DAVIS...TALES AND BEYOND

by Sig Case

Aside from Al Feldstein, no person shaped the look and character of **Tales From The Crypt** more than Jack Davis did. His work first appeared in Tales in 1951: a six-pager entitled "Séance" buried in the three-spot. EC readers received his work with an enthusiasm that quickly earned him forty-two more stories and eighteen covers.

Jack Davis did the leadoff Cryptkeeper stories for the last twenty-three issues. The combination of a Davis cover and the first story was a powerful combination that did much to establish Tales as the flagship title for EC. A Davis cover is instantly identifiable from its simple and overall bold design supported by complex and richly detailed inkwork, the classic 'look' for the last eighteen issues. Inside, we find the same fluid brush and pen inkwork embedded in a masterful page layout of kinetically interlocking panels. Here and there a panel carrying the impact points of the story are done in an energetic abstract design.

Davis' style matured quickly. Within a year he had lost the clumsiness seen in his earliest work, absorbing – and perhaps improving upon – the conventions used by his peers rather than trying to reinvent them. The EC editors also appreciated both his speed and his professionalism, Davis respected deadlines and assignments; he wouldn't let them down. His Cryptkeeper, Old Witch and Vault Keeper portraits built on Feldstein's and Craig's initial concepts and became the template that others used for their variations and embellishments.

Some EC fans complained that Davis' style, while unique and engaging, didn't seem to vary, being pretty much the same whether he was illustrating an over-the-top horror story for **Tales From The Crypt** or a somber war story for **Two Fisted Tales** freighted with ethical instruction. They point out that his work for **Mad** and **Panic** looks only slightly more exaggerated and cartoony than his work in Tales. Others say that his jaunty style defangs the sometimes overwrought prose in Tales, a counterpoint that plays well against the weighty, gothic test and makes the whole more than the sum of its parts.

Over time Davis' style has remained constant, but his execution has changed noticeably. His earliest work is dominated by brushwork, the pen being used for the minimum necessary blends and crosshatching, and perhaps a little light detail drawing. He seems to have used crosshatching mainly to modify the severe 'high contrast' appearance that his brushwork conveyed. This gradually gave way to an even greater use of the pen. The change is noticeable even in the short interval between his first story in Tales and his last.

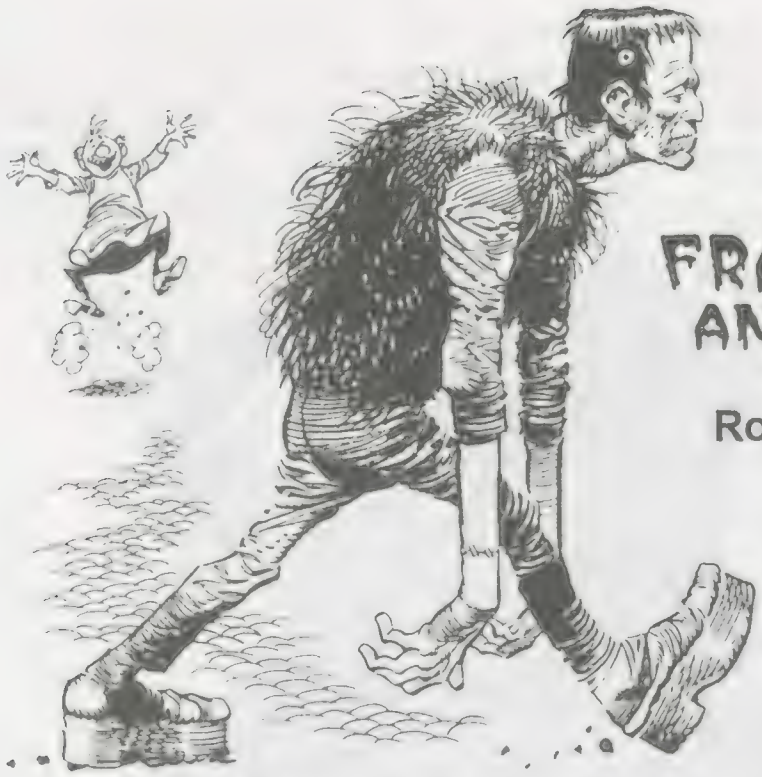
By the time he was doing work for Kurtzman's Humbug magazine in the mid 1950s, little brushwork remained. Davis had perfected a better method for emphasizing the main elements of the panel – he fully detailed and crosshatched them, while leaving the background in almost outline form. In fact, apart from their very different underlying styles, Davis and Elder were using nearly identical inking techniques at this time. Judging from his contemporary work, there seems little chance he would ever return to the thick, swoopy brush strokes that characterized his classic work in Tales.

Since the days of **Tales From The Crypt** and the other EC comics, Davis' work has appeared in publications ranging from movie posters to industrial

Davis' first (below) and last (above) EC splash pages.

equipment advertisements. His advertising work is most often done in watercolor, a technique seen only once in an 'old EC', cover of **Mad** number twenty-seven. Davis is now a very successful commercial illustrator, so naturally he has many imitators. Some have adopted his style so completely that it takes a second look to see the difference.

FREIND...?
EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEK!
HEY!
GLUG
B.T. '92



FRANKY AND ME

by

Roger Hill

I discovered **FAMOUS MONSTERS** magazine in 1959 when I was eleven years old. I'll never forget it. My brother and I used to hang out at the local drugstore before and after school in those days. We'd play the jukebox, drink a cherry-coke or two, and basically grab-ass around with other friends of ours until the manager of the place would give us the evil eye or ask us to leave. I guess it was in the Fall of 1959 that we spied **FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND** sitting there on the old wooden style newsstands, which back in those days, was about 30 feet long and loaded to the brim with some of the most bizarre and risqué publications you could ever imagine. That's not to imply that **FAMOUS MONSTERS** was bizarre or risqué, but it certainly had covers that could attract your attention. It was the cover to issue #5, dated November 1959 that grabbed our attention one day. A Frank Neutzell cover painting of Bela Lugosi from the 1930's film ISLAND OF LOST SOULS stared out at us from the newsstand and we couldn't resist it. We plunked down our hard-earned allowance money of thirty-five cents. My brother and I had already been indoctrinated to the world of horror movies through the televised Shock-package selection of feature films that were shown each Friday night on our local NIGHTMARE horror show. The show had originally debuted in 1958 and by the time we discovered **FAMOUS MONSTERS**, we had pretty much already devoured the Universal classics in the comfort of our darkened livingrooms and were devoted fans for life of Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and both Lon Chaneys.

As most fans are aware, **FAMOUS MONSTERS** originally started in 1958 under the editorship of long time science fiction and horror enthusiast, collector and fan Forrest J. Ackerman, and was published by a fellow named James Warren. Ackerman was based in Los Angeles while Warren was in New York, and together these gentlemen produced a magazine that would last for 25 years and about 191 issues. My brother and I quickly became staunch supporters of **FM** and from issue #5 on usually bought 2 copies of every issue that came out. We also sent off for back issues to where we each had our own sets of **FM** to look at. We always handled our magazines very carefully and tried to keep them in the best condition possible. We also enjoyed sending off for

other monstrous goodies that were offered in the back pages of **FM**. Warren Publishing had their own little merchandising department called Captain Company. Here you could find a vast selection of some of the weirdest and most horrific monster memorabilia ever conceived. Shrunken heads, rubber bats, giant flys and all kinds of monster masks, hands and feet were available from the Captain Company but, as we soon found out, sometimes it would take months to receive the items ordered. I remember in one instance my mother had to send a follow-up letter to remind the good old Captain Company to send the Creature From the Black Lagoon mask and hands that we had ordered months before. Items always did show up eventually, usually just in time for Halloween so that my brother and I could dress up in the new monster garb and wreak havoc on the neighborhood.

Captain Company offered a continuously changing selection of cool monster memorabilia. Certain items came and went, and I was always perusing through these pages wishing that I could afford to order every single item. Then one day, something new got added. There it was, for the first time, advertised right on the back cover of **FM** #18, dated July 1962. The advertisement read as follows:

> ***GIANT LIFE SIZE FRANKENSTEIN PIN-UP... OVER 6 FEET TALL!***
> *Never anything like it before! A gigantic, unbelievable drawing of the FRANKENSTEIN MONSTER, over 6 feet tall – by America's greatest cartoonist-artist JACK DAVIS. The FRANKENSTEIN PIN-UP will supply 100 hours of laughs and thrills: have your picture taken alongside your favorite ghoul; scotch-tape it to the inside of your bedroom or den door; put it between someone's bed sheets, or just pin it on the wall. A million dollars worth of value for a low price! Order yours now – supply limited. Only $2.00.*

Wow! What a great image this was! Davis had captured – in his typical cartoonish style – the tall lean figure of Boris Karloff as he looked in the 1939 Universal classic SON OF FRANKENSTEIN. The monster was even wearing one of those hairy jackets like he wore in the movie. I flipped out. I just thought this thing was awesome. I knew I had to order one. So I did. I sent off my two bucks and sure enough, a few weeks later, the poster arrived rolled in a tube. Needless to say, we immediately hung it on the outside of the door of the room, which we were now calling our "monster den". Basically it was kind of a spare bedroom, but we kept all of our monster memorabilia, including the monster magazines stored in there.

My brother had made an elaborate pendulum out of cardboard that looked just like the one from the Vincent Price movie THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM. Naturally we put it up over the doorway. Now the Frankenstein pin-up was on the door, along with a little cloth sign that said: BEWARE, ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK. Or something like that. It also had red drippings around it to look like blood. By this time, we had all kinds of monstrous movie posters and monster photos tacked up on the wall inside the monster den and with the addition of the Jack Davis Frankenstein poster to guard the doorway, it became our own little HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM, so to speak. I remember the first time some of the other neighborhood gang came over and freaked out at the thought of having to walk past the Frankenstein pin-up to get into the room.

Eventually they all came to accept the poster as being cool – which of course it was – and on later occasions some of the kids would talk to the poster before entering. You know, like "How's it going Franky?" That sort of thing. As I think back on all of this now, I realize that the advertisement for the poster wasn't too far off when it said "100 hours of laughs and thrills".

We had a lot of fun with that 6-foot pin-up standing guard at the monster den door until one night a few weeks later. My parent's bedroom was located just down the hall from our monster den with the doors being about three or four feet apart at a diagonal from each other. I think we usually kept the monster den door totally closed at night. I am still not sure exactly how it happened but one night the door was left open allowing some moonlight to filter in and lightly illuminate the Frankenstein pin-up in the dark. At some point during the night my mom woke up and apparently was at just the right angle to catch a glimpse of what appeared to her to be a huge towering figure of a man standing in the doorway staring at her. I guess it scared the hell out of her. She thought someone had broken into the house. My brother and I were apparently sound sleepers and didn't hear her scream, but by the next morning she had calmed down considerably and proceeded to inform us at the breakfast table that it would be a good idea if we would move the Franky pin-up to the inside of the door. And sure enough, that's exactly what we did. Actually we liked it better that way because now we had our own television in that room and were in there a lot of the time. So now we could look at the Franky poster more because it was in there too. The poster remained on the door for many years until sometime in the early 1970's when I came back from the Navy and removed it, rolling it up for safe keeping. It had taken a lot of abuse over the years and I wanted to try to preserve it for as long as I could.

At the time I first saw the image of Davis' Frankenstein poster – now over 30 years ago – I'm not sure whether or not I actually knew who the artist Jack Davis was. I guess I really didn't know him by name, but I knew his art when I saw it. I knew he was the same artist who had drawn the FUNNY VALENTINE bubble gum card series in 1959 and sometime around that same period had done a beautifully watercolored monster gum card series called YOU'LL DIE LAUGHING. I bought all of these card series when they came out. I had also seen some of Davis' work for the early **MAD** comics through **MAD** paperback reprints. It was probably not until the Frankenstein poster came out that I really put the name Jack Davis together with all of this other cartoon stuff that I was enjoying and collecting. It wouldn't be until 1964 that I would begin discovering all of Jack Davis' other work for all the other EC comic titles. And that's when I actively started collecting everything that EC had published from the late 1940's through the 1960's.

Somewhere along the way I acquired a copy of the **TALES FROM THE CRYPT** #34, dated Feb.-Mar., 1953, with a fantastic cover depiction of a scene inside a wax museum, with a huge head portrait of the Frankenstein monster, drool running down his lips, staring out at you. This became one of my favorite TALES FROM THE CRYPT covers since I already had a nostalgic love for Davis' 6-foot Frankenstein poster. Years later, in the 1980's during a visit to the EC Vault of original artwork with Russ Cochran and Bill Gaines, I had the chance to pull out this original cover art by Davis and study it closely. Later on when Russ Cochran began auctioning off the original EC artwork, I decided this cover would have to be an addition to my collection. Sure enough, on the night of December

15, 1981, the piece hammered down at a price that, at the time, I considered ludicrous, but I paid it anyway and was happy to get it. I have collected original comic art now for over 30 years and during this time period had always wondered what happened to Davis' original drawing for the Frankenstein poster. It didn't seem to turn up in the Warren bankruptcy sale back in 1983 when thousands of covers and interior pages from FAMOUS MONSTERS, CREEPY, EERIE, VAMPIRELLA and other Warren publications were bought. Since 1983 other small caches of original art from Warren Publishing Company have surfaced, usually from other editors or artists who worked there. The Davis Frankenstein poster art remained a mystery. Perhaps it didn't exist anymore, or perhaps Jack Davis himself owned the artwork. I had contemplated writing Davis to ask about it but I never did.

Then one day in the late 1980's I received a phone call from an original art dealer who had just made a purchase of several originals from someone who used to work at Warren Publishing, (and who I believe still lived in New York.) No names were mentioned – and I have never found out who it was – but the deal consisted of several FM cover paintings by Basil Gogos, Ron Cobb, Vic Prezio and others. The deal also included some interior inked pages, along with...ta daaaah! Davis' original drawing of the Frankenstein poster. Yes!! After all these years of waiting and hoping, it had finally surfaced. Unfortunately, it wasn't for sale. The art dealer liked the piece very much himself and decided to hang onto it for awhile. One thing I've learned over the years in the original art market: you have to have a lot of patience in order to get the things you want. So after waiting patiently for about ten years, the art dealer finally put the piece up on the market. Unfortunately, I could not afford it. Apparently no one else could afford it either and eventually the price was lowered to a more reasonable level. Well, I still could not afford it, but I had to have it and so I went ahead and bought it. The original is done with pen, brush, ink wash, and charcoal pencil on 28 inch by 12.5 inch piece of Whatman board. The illustration itself measures 26 inches by 9 inches and the feet are a paste-over, beneath which two different feet are drawn. Apparently Davis had originally drawn the monster with regular shoes before someone remember and suggested that the monster's feet should appear more like they had in the SON OF FRANKENSTIN film: huge and bulky.

As a follow-up to all of this, back in March of this year, I was able to have a short phone conversation with retired publisher Jim Warren about this classic piece of poster art. Jim remembered the piece well and told me that Davis had produced the monstrous illustration while sitting in his office. Warren had requested Davis to come in to talk about doing this job, and of course Davis, back in those days, had a habit of carrying ink and brushes around with him. Having heard many stories from Bill Gaines over the years about how fast Jack Davis used to be back in the EC comic publishing days, I couldn't resist asking Jim Warren how long it took Jack to knock-out the Frankenstein poster art, since he apparently did it right there on the spot for him. Warren responded "Roger, you wouldn't believe it. It took him ooohhhh, about the time it takes to eat a sandwich." I said, "Huh?" Warren went on to say "Well, I remember we sent out for some sandwiches because it was over the lunch hour that he arrived, and in about the time it took him to eat the sandwich, he was finished. It was incredible! I've never in my life seen anyone work like that, with that kind of speed. You'd had to been there to appreciate it."

After speaking with Jim Warren about the creation of this "monster" I realized just how true the stories were that I had always heard about Jack Davis' speed. Incredible! He was always referred to as the fastest artist in the business. Warren said the poster had sold like crazy when it came out and of course, I wasn't too surprised to hear that. For us young **FAMOUS MONSTER** boppers of the late 1950's and early 1960's the poster was the answer to the horrific pipe dreams. We all wanted to own our own, real life-sized monster. A buddy...a pal...a friend! Friend gooooddddddddd! For many kids, perhaps it served as a horror figure they could look up to during those early years when monster fans and collectors were considered odd and weird by most of the human population. Most people outside our circle of interests would probably just consider the Frankenstein poster art nothing more than a two-dimensional drawing of grotesqueness. But what do they know? They never had to sleep across the hall from it, now did they?

FRANKENSTEIN

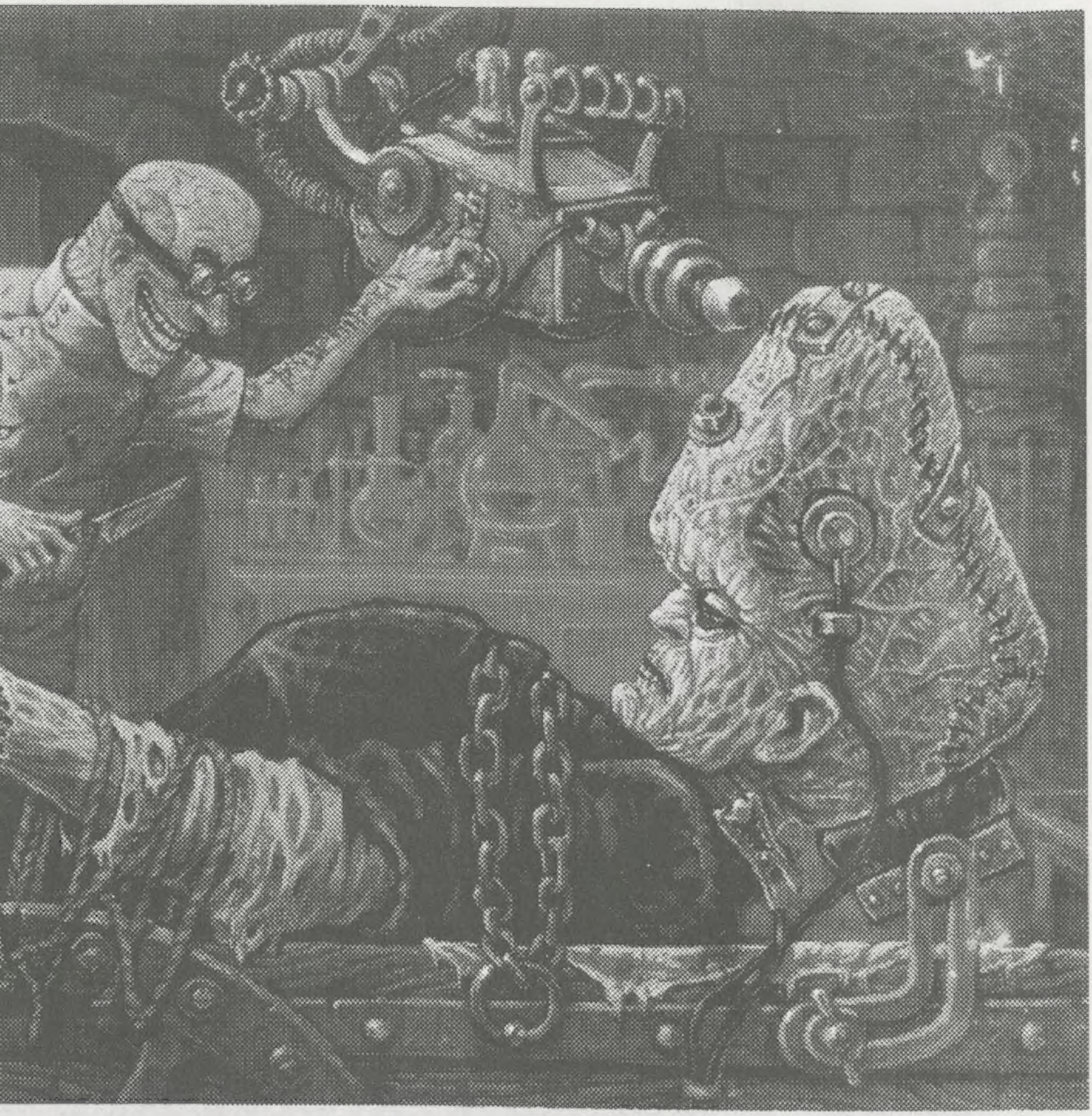
BY JACK DAVIS

THEN...1962

NOW...1992

Frankenstein's Monster has been rendered by countless artists in many diverse styles.

The 12 x 24" painting (top) was created in 1997 by XNO from a stylized ink drawing he created (right) for XEX comix back in the eighties.



XNO
©1992